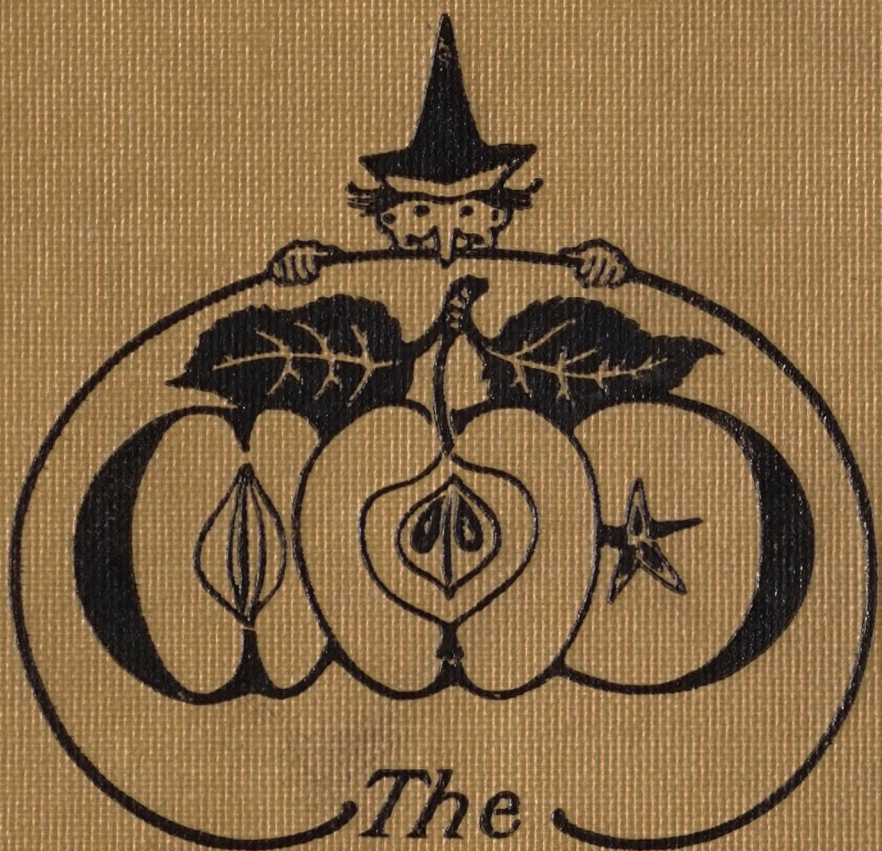


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CHICAGO

THE APPLE-TREE SPRITE

BY

MARGARET WARNER MORLEY

Author of

"A SONG OF LIFE," "WILL O' THE WASPS,"
"THE BEE PEOPLE," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED



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I

THE APPLE TREE

CHRISTOBEL went to sleep in the apple tree. She climbed into the low crotch, made herself comfortable, and went to sleep.

The tree was covered with pink and white blossoms that clustered close about her. They looked at her and kept very still.

A mother robin sat on her eggs in the tree top, only the tip of her bill showing over the rim of the nest. The father bird stopped singing when he saw Christobel. He turned his head on one side, stooped down and looked at her.

"That is not a bird," he thought. "It looks more like a big white apple blossom with red trimmings." He thought this because Christobel had on a white dress and red hair-ribbons and red stockings.

Suddenly a little red topknot bobbed around the tree trunk, and then bobbed back again out of sight. Mr. Woodpecker had his nest in a hole in the tree where his wife was sitting on the eggs. He went in and told her about it. "I am sure it is a little girl," he said, "and that is not as bad as a cat."

A bit of a wren came flitting close and looked her over. Then he hurried away, scolding with all his might.

The honey bees flew over her on their way to get honey from the flowers. A big black wasp settled on her hand for a mo-

ment, flirted his wings and buzzed on about his business. A yellow-girdled bumble bee fumbled about in a flower cup close to her ear, loading his baskets with pollen bread.

The sun up in the sky rained golden light all over the tree and the apple blossoms and Christobel.



II

NOW COMES THE SPRITE

ALL at once Christobel came wide awake. At least that is the way it seemed to her when she thought about it afterwards.

"Dear me," she said, "I wish I had a ripe apple, right now." Then she stared and sat up straight. What she saw was a

little old woman with cheeks as red as a rose, and a smile as pleasant as a May day. She had a silky-white shawl over her shoulders and a neat white cap on her head, and she looked very wise, although she was scarcely six inches high.

"She reminds me of grandmother," thought Christobel. Then the little old woman spoke in a very pleasant voice—"just like grandmother's," again thought Christobel.

"My Dear," said the little old woman, "I can give you a ripe apple right off this tree, but first I shall have to finish it; you can see for yourself that the apples are only just begun."

"Oh," said Christobel, politely, "you must not hurry on my account. It must be a great deal of trouble to finish up so many apples—do you have it all to do?"

"I should think so!" and the little old woman laughed merrily. "Not only the apples on this tree, but on every tree in the orchard. For you must know that each orchard has its own Apple-Tree Sprite, and

I am the Sprite of this one. Would you like to see me finish an apple?"

"Oh, yes, that I would," said Christobel eagerly; then added, "but perhaps I ought not to bother you. Mother says I am always bothering her to do one thing when she wants to do another."

"Oh, no matter," said the little old woman in so cheery a tone that Christobel laughed aloud. "It will amuse me to finish up an apple right off. It will be something new. Generally I do a little on all of them and there are so many I never get done with it before summer is over and gone. Besides, now is as good as any time to show you a thing or two while you are asleep."

"Am I asleep?" asked Christobel, very much mortified.

"If you are, so much the better; your mind won't be wandering about whenever a turkey clucks or a chicken peeps. So much the better." And the little old woman nodded her head solemnly three times, and then burst out laughing and laughed until

Christobel could not help joining in, and laughed and laughed too, until she thought she would roll out of the tree.

"Dear me," said the little old woman, wiping her eyes with a handkerchief as fine as a cobweb, "dear me, it is the smell of the apple blossoms. It always makes one feel like laughing."

"I have noticed it," said Christobel.

III

A SHOWER OF PETALS

"NOW watch!" and the Apple-Tree Sprite flashed like light among the flowers, now here, now there. It seemed to Christobel that she was everywhere at once.

Then something happened. Down from the tree fell a shower of petals. They all let go at once, dozens and hundreds of them, floating and turning about and settling down to the ground that was already white with petals. For when apple blossoms fall, as you well know, they look white rather than pink as they cover the earth.

How Christobel laughed! "That was so pretty," she cried, "like tiny white butterflies dancing about in the air; or no, it was like great big pink and white snow flakes, and there is the snow on the ground."

"You may think it a small matter to take off the petals from more than a hundred big trees," said the Sprite with a merry laugh as she came to rest, light as thistledown, on a twig near Christobel; "but I can tell you, it is a big undertaking. I feel as if I had worked a year by the time it is over with."

"Oh, but," said Christobel, in surprise, "why now, did you do it? I thought the wind blew them off!"

"Well, that is where you are mistaken, My Dear," said the little old woman, whose eyes twinkled so, and whose cheeks grew so red that Christobel thought she must be going to have another laughing fit.

"Of course the wind helps when all is ready; but first I have to go about and carefully loosen each petal. Otherwise the wind might blow himself hoarse and not one would let go. You think it cruel to send them fluttering down away from their tree? Oh, My Dear, how could the little apples grow if they staid forever coddled up in pink petals? The petals, you know,

are only the clothing after all. They are the pretty baby clothes of the little green apples. Now I must be off again," and Christobel saw the little old woman flashing here and there all over the tree. When she got a little way off she looked like a tiny star.

"Now watch!" and she again alighted on a twig close to Christobel. "Listen!" and Christobel heard a breeze running and dancing through the trees. "That little breeze is after them," chuckled the little old woman. And then the breeze caught them, and whirled them, and tossed them. Into its arms leaped each pink petal, around and about, up and down and away they danced and whirled in a grand frolic. Then they all settled down as sedate as snowflakes to the ground.

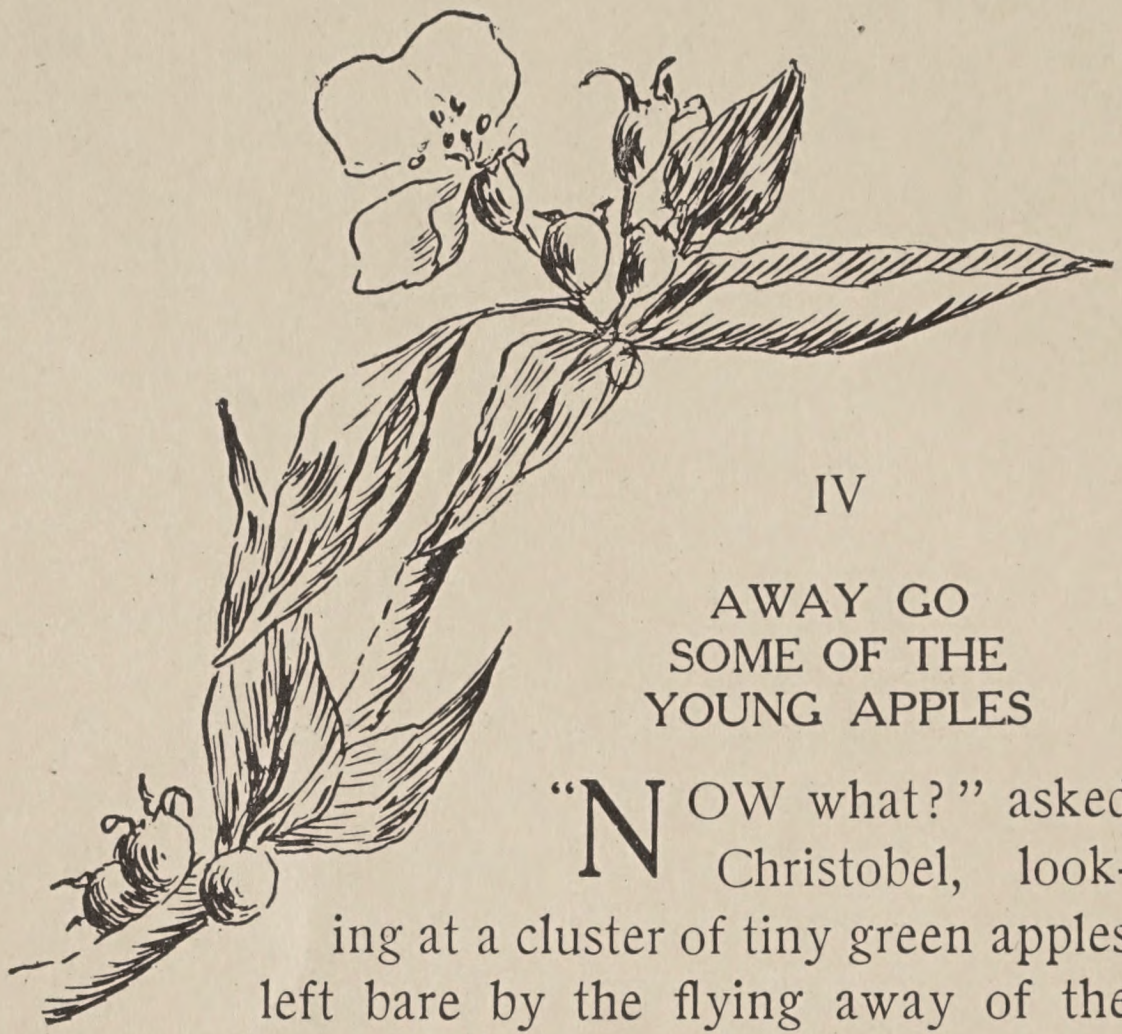
Christobel had stuffed her fist into her mouth to keep from squealing at the pretty sight. Now she took it out and said, "Oh, but that was pretty! How do you do it? How do you make them let go?"

"I'll show you," and the little old woman pinched the end of a petal that had not yet

fallen. She pinched it just where it was fastened to the flower. Christobel noticed that her fingers were as slender as the feelers of a May fly, and yet wherever they pinched it, the petal dried up at that point. "Pinch some more," begged Christobel, and the little old woman pinched and pinched, until another breeze came along and carried away all the petals she had loosened.

"That," said the little old woman, as they watched the merry dance, "is the very first step towards finishing up an apple. You must get rid of the petals, you know."





IV

AWAY GO SOME OF THE YOUNG APPLES

"NOW what?" asked Christobel, looking at a cluster of tiny green apples left bare by the flying away of the petals. "If those were real babies they would surely take cold out in the wind with nothing on—but they are hard as bullets, and not much bigger—queer apples, those!"

The fairy laughed and began to caress one of the little green bullets, and Christobel saw it grow larger and smoother under her magic touch. The rest of the apples in the same cluster did not grow at all.



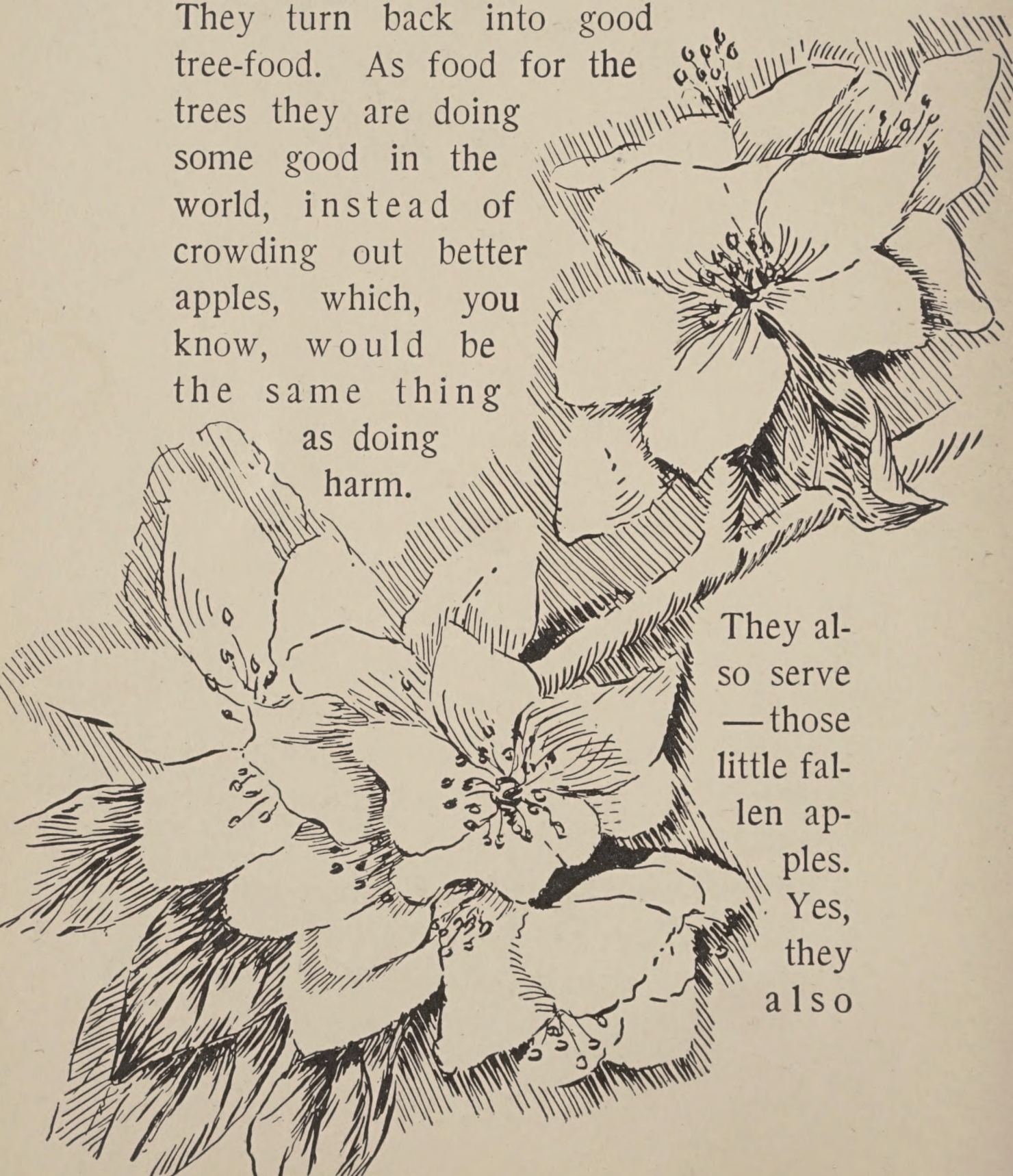
"Those other apples must all fall off like the petals. I will attend to that in a minute," said the little old woman, as she saw Christobel looking at them and wondering.

"Oh, the poor little apples," cried Christobel; "do help them, too; why need they fall?"

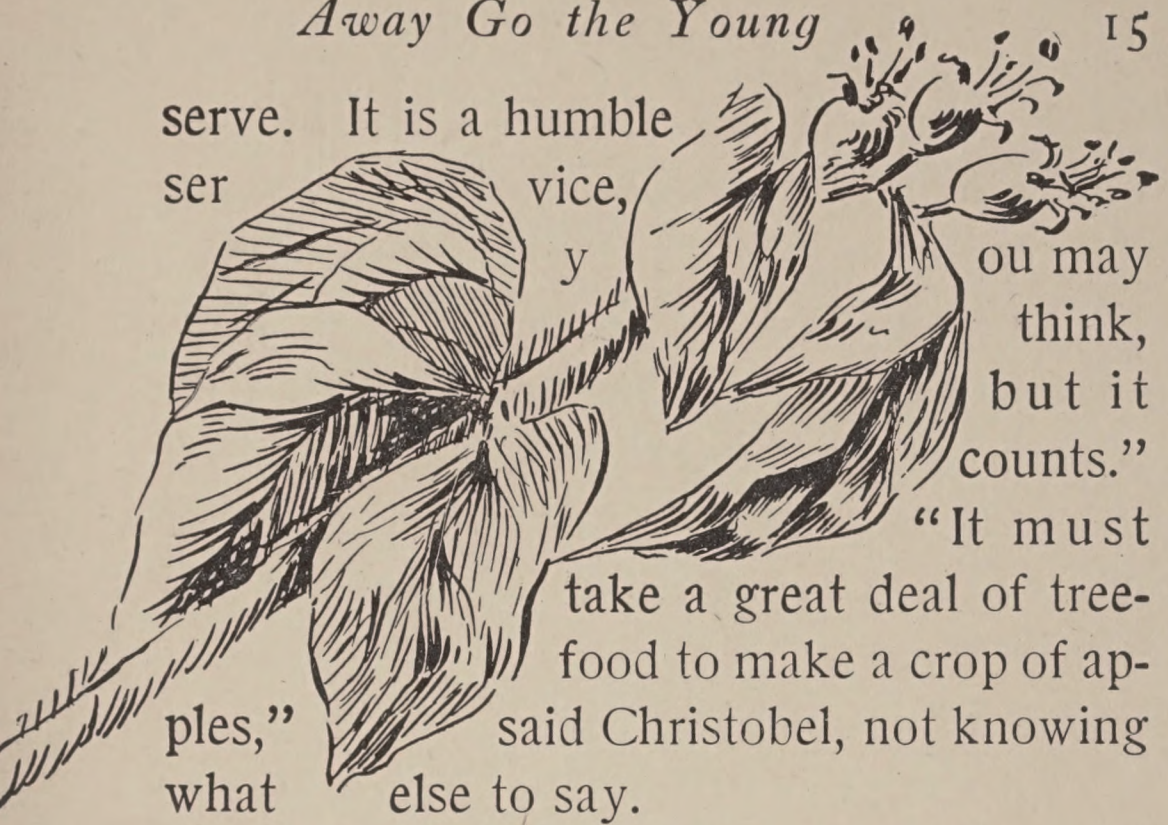
"Oh, it won't hurt," laughed the little old woman. "They won't know anything about it, poor dears; they will just disappear. It does no harm to disappear, you know, if you don't know it. The reason they must go is this: if they all grew up, how much room would there be on that twig for them? You see, there would not be room for any of them to grow properly. Now, when I finish apples I want them worth the trouble. So I take only the biggest and best in each cluster, and help the others down to the ground where they have something worth while to do."

"Something to do? Down there on the ground — all dead and rotten?" and Christobel's lip trembled for a moment.

The Sprite looked at her, then said gently: "You don't understand, child. They turn back into what they came from. They turn back into good tree-food. As food for the trees they are doing some good in the world, instead of crowding out better apples, which, you know, would be the same thing as doing harm.



They also serve — those little fallen apples. Yes, they also



serve. It is a humble service, you may think, but it counts."

"It must take a great deal of tree-food to make a crop of apples," said Christobel, not knowing what else to say.

"I should think so," and the little old woman laughed again, and her laughter now sounded like a chime of little silver bells, and Christobel noticed how she had changed. She seemed all made of dew drops and sunbeams so that the very air about her sparkled and smelled damp and sweet. Christobel began to feel warm and lazy as one feels in midsummer, and she saw that the little apple the fairy was still caressing kept on growing.

And now the light little fingers touched the stems of some of the other little apples in the cluster, and lo! the stems at the point

where she touched them withered away until they no longer clung fast to the branch but one by one fell lightly to the ground.

Christobel thought the little old woman's face looked sad at the moment this happened, but she could not be sure, for in a moment it sparkled and shone, and her cheeks were as red as the heart of the sun at midday.

"I don't take the whole cluster off at once," she said, gaily; "if I left only one apple to grow, something might go wrong with it, then where would you be! Besides, it is only fair to give them all a chance. The weakest go right away. But the rest stay on, and after awhile the next weakest have to go, and so on until only one or two of the best stay."

"But if you make them all, why do you make one better than the rest?"

The fairy shook her head. "I don't make them—and I do. They have to help—that is all I can say. I can't help making some better than others. It comes so in spite of me."

Christobel clapped her hands. "The poorest of the little green apples fall off! Now that is why we always see the ground under the apple tree covered with little green apples! I used to wonder why they did it, and wish they would stay on the tree and grow. But now I see they fall off, or else we wouldn't have any good apples at all!"

"Yes," said the fairy, nodding her head very fast and dimpling all over. "Now you have it. The best stay on. The others have to get out of the way. It is a law of nature, and a good law, too."

"Now," went on the fairy, "you must go, your mother is calling you; and as for me — well, you know there is work enough for me to do with these petals not all off yet, and a whole orchardful of apples to finish up, to say nothing of the leaves that are only half done."

"Do you have to make all the leaves too? I wish I could help you," said Christobel, longingly. She thought it would be a fine thing to spend the summer finishing up

apples. But all of a sudden she discovered that the fairy had gone and that her mother really was calling, although she had not heard her before.



V

WHEN THE FAIRY COMES AGAIN

"WHY, Christobel, where have you been?" asked mother, a little impatiently. "I have been calling and calling."

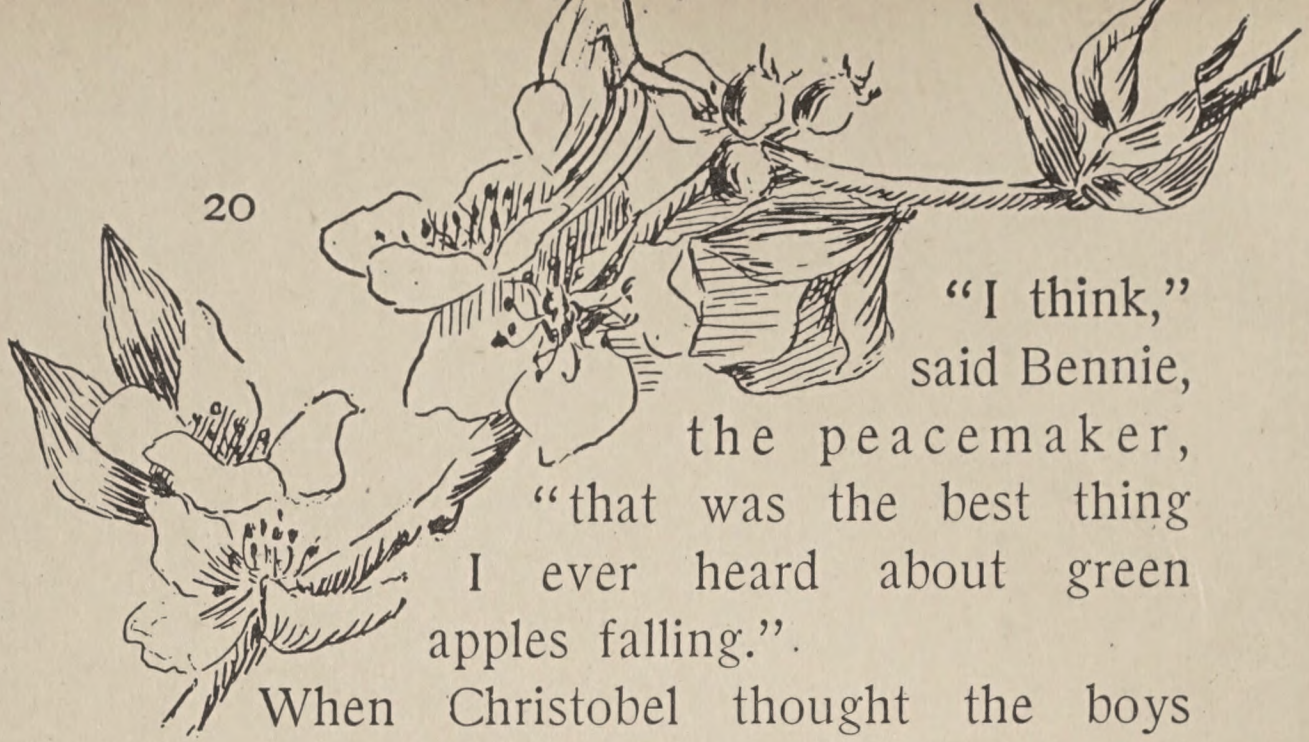
"I didn't hear only the last call," said Christobel, rushing into the house. "And, oh, Mummy Dear, do you know all those things father told us about how apples grow are true! I have seen it with my own eyes," and she told about the visit from the Apple-Tree Sprite, in which her mother was very much interested.

"It is a pretty story," said mother, when it was done, "and the best of it is, it is all true."

Of course, Christobel told it all over to her father and the boys that night.

"You went to sleep and dreamed it," said Robert, teasingly.

"No matter if she did," said father, catching Christobel as she made a dash at Robert.



"I think," said Bennie, the peacemaker, "that was the best thing I ever heard about green apples falling."

When Christobel thought the boys were not looking, she climbed into the apple tree again, but could not see the fairy anywhere. She tried for several days, but as she saw nothing, she finally gave it up, and just lay and looked up into the sky.

"Now have your eyes about you, My Dear," cried a merry, wee little voice.

"Oh, it is you," exclaimed Christobel, delightedly, and sure enough, there sat the Apple-Tree Sprite, not three feet away, smiling and nodding.

"Where were you?" asked Christobel in surprise. "I have been looking everywhere."

The fairy laughed and then repeated, "Now have your eyes about you, for here is a sight you will not see every day." And

Christobel, looking, saw indeed a strange thing. The little apple the Sprite was caressing seemed to have become transparent like glass. She could see inside it and watch what was going on there. Not that the apple itself had changed, but the fairy had given Christobel's eyes the power to see through the apple. The right kind of fairies can do that, you know.

"Why!" cried Christobel, "you are building up the apple like a little block house, and how funny! you keep splitting the blocks to make more; and the blocks—why, they grow!"

"Just keep looking," said the fairy, gleefully; "just keep looking."

"Why!" exclaimed Christobel, "I see the sap streaming in, down through the little apple stem. It comes running in and bathes all the little blocks and they grow!"

"That is just it!" cried the fairy, who grew brighter and gayer every minute, so that no one could any longer say she looked like a little old woman. As she spoke she

caressed the young apple yet more lovingly, and it grew larger and larger, and Christobel saw little white seeds inside the core.

"Oh, see!" she cried; "the little seeds are fastened to the sides by oh, such tiny, tiny stems. Why," she went on, "through those very tiny stems the sap flows in, and oh, it is your wee fingers, there inside the seeds, weaving and weaving and making the seeds larger!"

"I don't quite like you to call my building material blocks," said the Sprite with a merry nod at Christobel. "Blocks make one think of hard, dead, solid chunks of wood. Now, these little things I use are neither hard nor dead. They are alive. They are like very delicate skins filled with clear jelly, only this jelly is alive, and they have many shapes."

"Oh, I know!" exclaimed Christobel, suddenly remembering, "your little live building blocks are called 'cells'—isn't that it?"

"Yes, that is what men call them; it is

better to give them a name of their own, you know," and the Sprite went on weaving away at the magic apple.

"What am I to call you?" asked Christobel, feeling sudden awe of the cheery and wonderful little creature.

As the child asked this, the fairy seemed to flame out in a great light, and her voice was very sweet as she said, "I am a servant of the good God. I follow his will. Now watch!" and the apple began to enlarge faster and faster.

"How it does grow — you can almost see it grow!" said Christobel, just as her mother said of the apples on this tree every year.

"Almost!" sparkled the fairy, and laughed merrily, while Christobel laughed too and said, "Oh, this time I can quite see it grow, and how much lighter and looser the pulp looks now, and it is getting to be such a clear, pretty color, and see — why, the apple is full size now, the seeds, have turned black, too! and, oh dear! oh dear!" — for the air was all hot and sweet

like early autumn, and such a change was taking place in the apple!

"I am baking it for you now, My Dear," said the fairy merrily. "You know ripe apples are just apples baked by the sunshine that I pour into them—there!" and sure enough, the sour, hard pulp of the green apple suddenly mellowed and became full of rich golden juice, and a delicate and delicious fragrance streamed forth until all the world smelled like a ripe apple.

"I must paint the skin a little," said the fairy, still caressing the apple, which began to grow red, and became redder and redder, until it was the reddest-red apple you ever saw.

"It is so pretty!" cried Christobel, "I shall never be able to eat it, I know. And yet, how good it smells. Dear me! To think of ever having anything as lovely as apples to eat."



VI

THE CRADLES

CHRISTOBEL could still see inside the apple, right through the bright red skin, and she noticed how the fairy's fingers had woven the core together with tough threads made of the core cells until it was hard enough to stick in your throat.

"Why wouldn't a soft core be rather nice?" suggested Christobel, a little timidly, for she did not wish to seem to criticise the work of the fairy.

"Why, My Dear," said the Sprite, laughing gleefully, and shaking her head, "the truth is, this core is a cradle. It is the cradle of the apple seeds, and they, you know, are

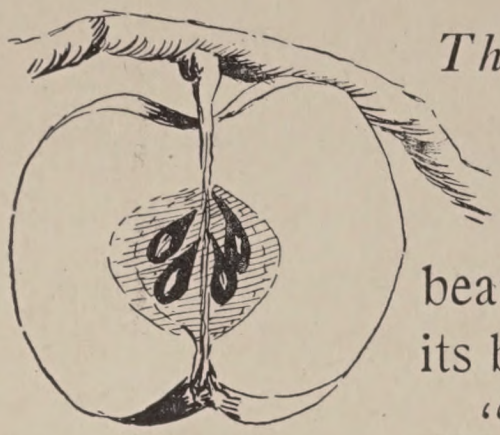
the children of the tree. Yes, the little seed babies need a good strong cradle to protect them from being chewed up by cows or boys, or by anybody who might chance to eat the apple. The seed babies are important, you know — the dear little children of the apple tree."

"Oh, I see," said Christobel, "but I wonder why you always make five little cradles in the core; no more, no less. I have often noticed it."

"I can't tell you that, My Dear, any more than I can tell you why I always make five dainty petals and five strong, green calyx lobes on each flower. Five is my number, that is all I can say."

"The petals fall off, but the calyx stays, and so do the dried-up stamens," said Christobel. "See, each little green apple is tipped with five green points and a crowd of little dried-up stamens, and — oh, dear me, here they are, all withered up and brown, on the ripe apple, too!"

The Sprite smiled and twinkled. "Yes, they stay on. They are all that remains of



the blossom. The finished apple always bears those reminders of its blossoming days."

"I am glad they stay on," said Christobel, "they finish the apple off so well. Why, an apple would not look like itself without the little dried-up brown rose in the dimple opposite the stem. Dear me!" and Christobel suddenly clapped her hands. "Suppose the petals did not fade and fall; suppose they staid on the end of the apple, too; wouldn't that be pretty!"

The fairy laughed a little sadly. "You wouldn't like it," she said; "it would be neither one thing nor the other; there are reasons why you wouldn't like it."

"My little botany book says that the apple-tree blossoms and the apples grow all for the sake of the apple-seed children," said Christobel, suddenly remembering.

The fairy shook her head. "Half right and two-thirds wrong, My Dear. Almost everything that people write is that way—half right and two-thirds wrong. Please

remember that. The tree blossoms and the seeds grow, is the truer way to put it. No, no, the tree does not blossom for the seeds alone; but when the tree bursts out into beautiful flowers — why, then the seeds are a part of it. And it is so with the apple, too. The rich, juicy apple is not wholly for the sake of the seeds, but when the joy of life laughs out in lovely apples, the seeds are a part of it all. I hope you understand, My Dear."

"I do — sort of," said Christobel, hesitatingly.

The fairy laughed and it was like the tinkling of little silver bells. "Oh, My Dear! the fragrance and the loveliness of flowers are not wholly for the sake of the little senseless seeds. The fragrance and the flowers, My Dear, are the spring songs, the love songs of the blessed earth, and the seeds are born from them. You must not make a mistake and get it wrong, or it may make a difference with your whole life's happiness."

Christobel said nothing, and soon the

fairy went on,—"You might as well say, My Dear, that the sap runs, and the whole tree grows for the sake of the seeds."

"How absurd that would be!" laughed Christobel.

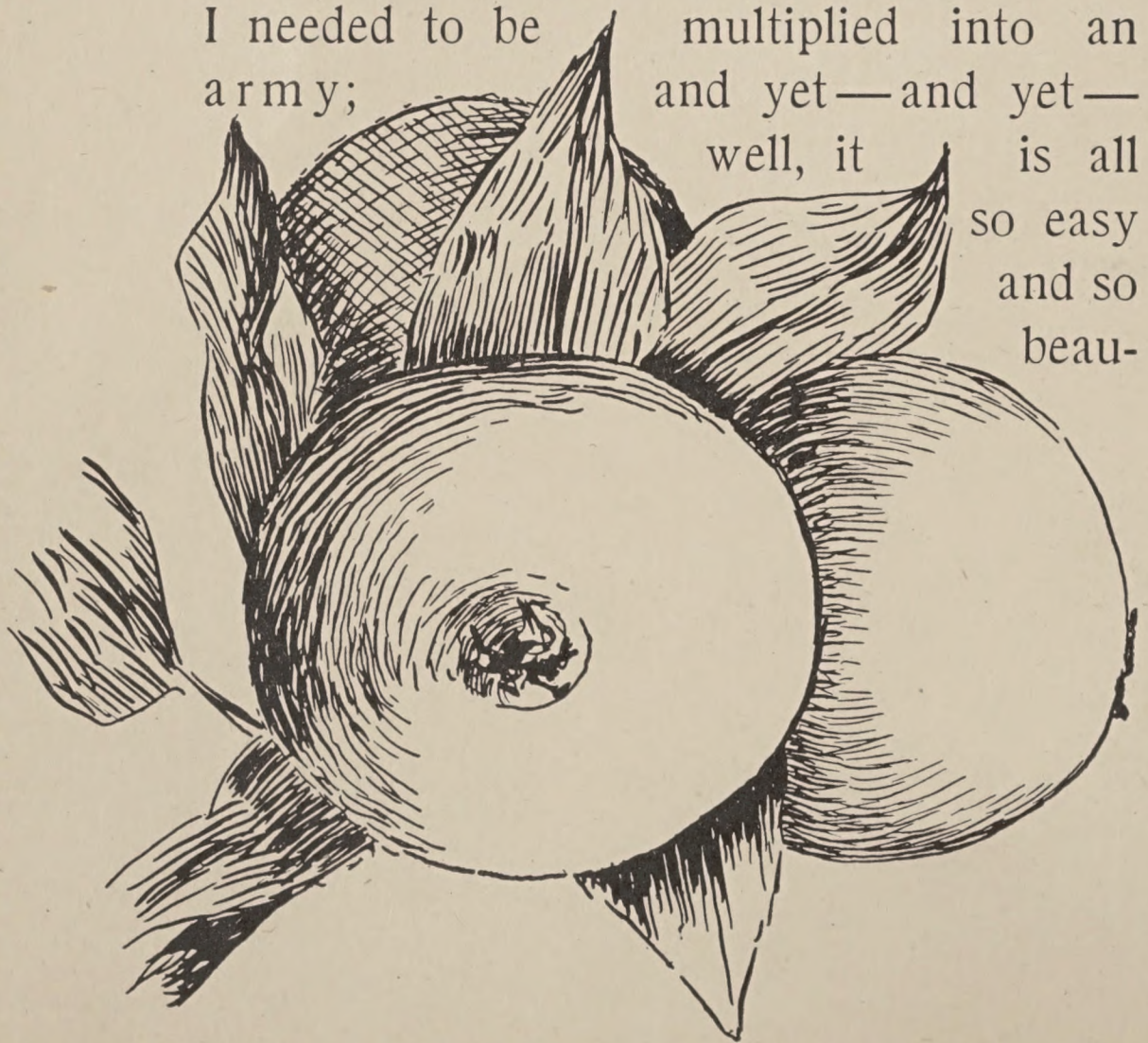
"Yes, yes, it would be absurd, utterly absurd; no, it's the other way—the sap runs and the tree grows in beauty, and it gives a part of its own great life to the seeds that other trees may spring from it, and grow in beauty and happiness."

VII

WHAT ELSE?

"DO you make the sap run and cause the tree to grow?" asked Christobel, thoughtfully. "Perhaps it is enough for one fairy, though, to make apples."

The fairy twinkled. "Yes, My Dear, I do it all, and you may believe that in the spring of the year I sometimes feel as though I needed to be multiplied into an army; and yet—and yet—well, it is all so easy and so beau-



tiful, one moment among the apple blossoms, the next at the root of the tree, down in the ground among the tender rootlets; oh, it is joy to wake up the young rootlets and put food into their eager, searching mouths! How the little tender mouths suck up the juices of the earth! And the lifeless food that they draw from the great earth mother they build into a living body."

"They first make it into sap," said Christobel.

"Yes, and what is sap? It is the blood of the plant, the rich, life-giving blood that mounts up through the roots, and through the trunk of the tree, and out through the branches and the little twigs to the green leaves, where it is changed into perfect food for the flowers and the fruits. Yes, My Dear, first and last, your apple is made of sap, the blood of the plant."

"Our blood is red," said Christobel.

"Yes, it is red, the loveliest rich-red color in the world; redder than rubies, My Dear, and more precious than rubies of Burmah.

You see your beautiful blood sometimes when you scratch your finger, and it comes rushing forth, hot and bright, the most brilliant red color there is in all the world. Oh, it is well for your blood to be red, My Dear. The blood of the plant is pale and thin; it does not need to be all rich and red like yours."

"What color is your blood, pretty fairy?" asked Christobel, curiously. But the fairy only laughed.

VIII

APPLE STEMS AND NECTAR CUPS POLLEN GRAINS AND OVULES

"THE sap gets into the apple through the stem," said Christobel, wishing to continue the conversation.

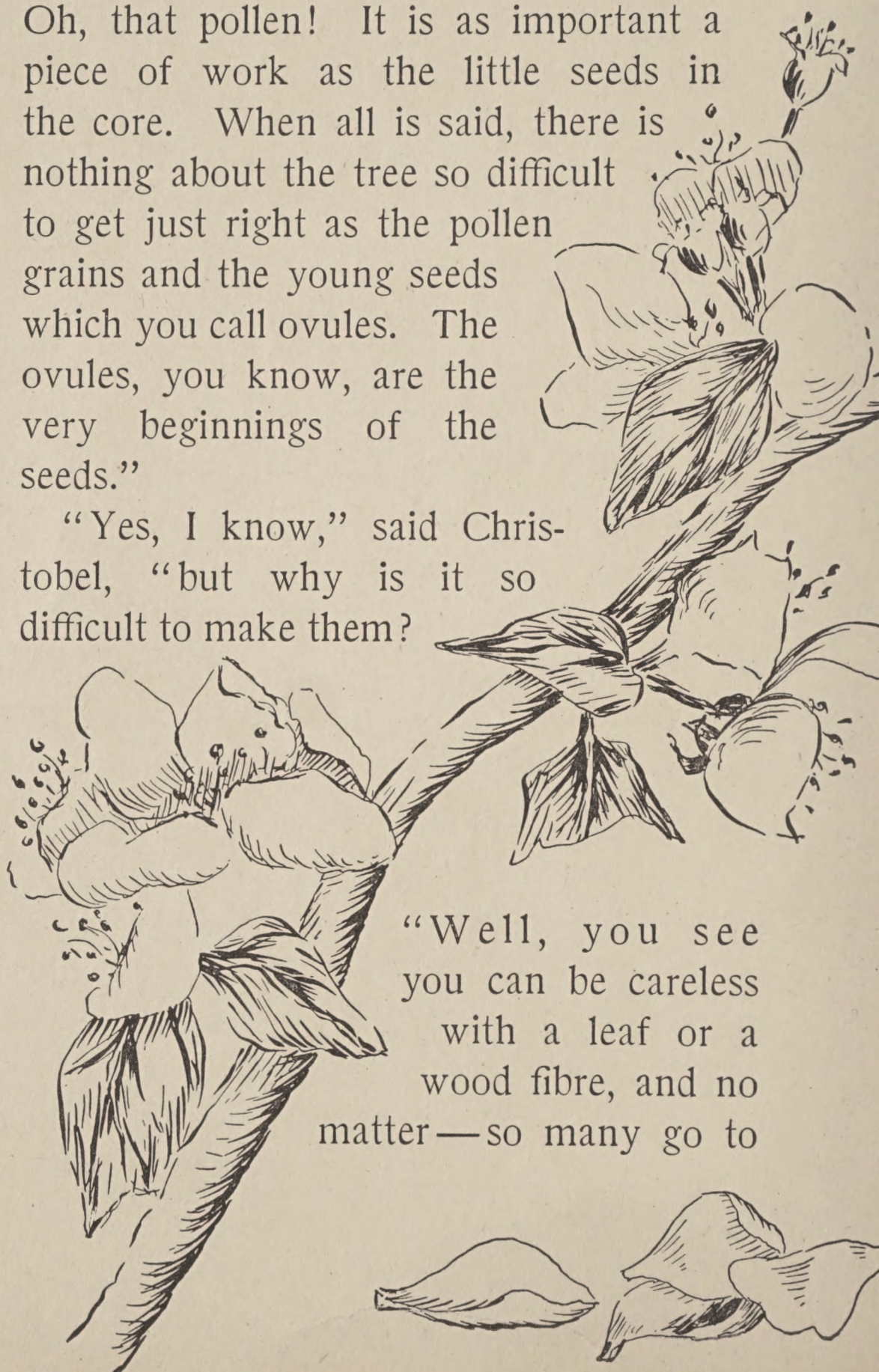
"Yes," responded the Apple-Tree Sprite, "it gets in through the stem. Every apple stem has to be made as carefully as can be so that the sap can pass through it into the core with its five little cradles, you know, and into the tiny seeds that are fastened to the cradles by tiny, tiny stems. It takes nimble wits to make an apple, My Dear."

"I should think so," said Christobel, "and so many things to think about in finishing up a flower — the nectar cups now. I should like to make nectar cups and fill them with honey for the bees."

"Oh, yes, it is a pleasant task to make nectar cups and distil the sweet nectar into

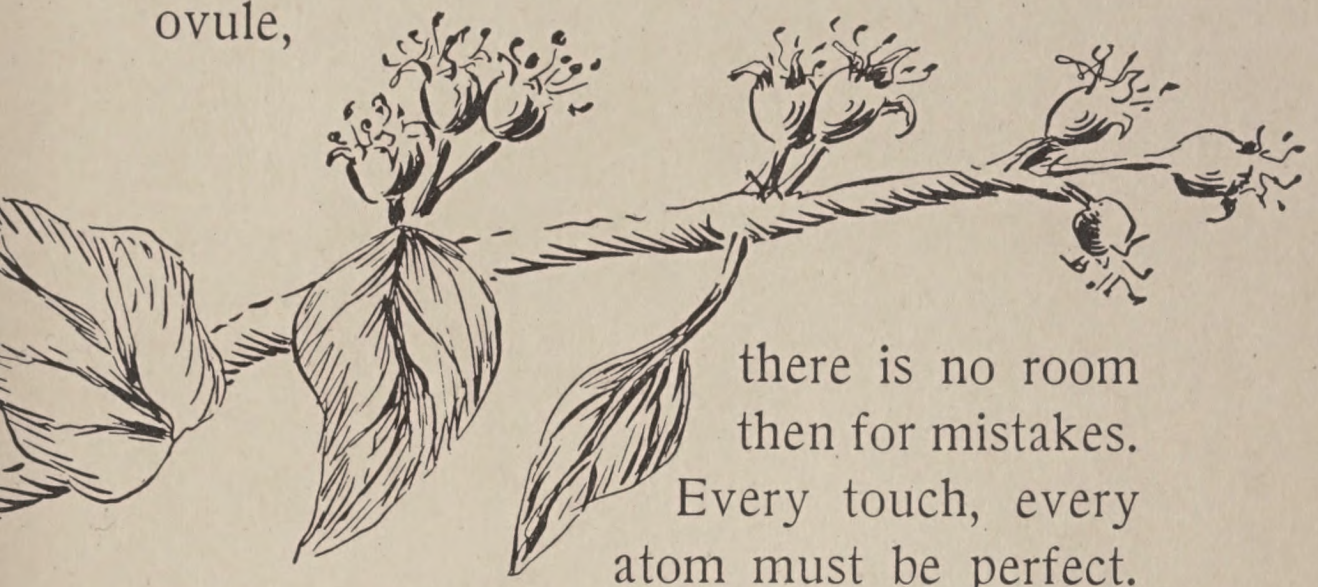
them. It is a joy, too, to make the anther pockets and fill them with pollen dust. Oh, that pollen! It is as important a piece of work as the little seeds in the core. When all is said, there is nothing about the tree so difficult to get just right as the pollen grains and the young seeds which you call ovules. The ovules, you know, are the very beginnings of the seeds."

"Yes, I know," said Christobel, "but why is it so difficult to make them?



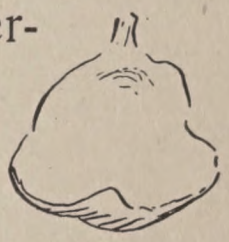
"Well, you see you can be careless with a leaf or a wood fibre, and no matter—so many go to

make a tree; but when it comes to a pollen grain, or an ovule,



there is no room then for mistakes. Every touch, every atom must be perfect. You see the whole tree must be put safely away in each pollen grain; think of that! and in each ovule. Ah, what a task is this! such countless millions of pollen grains to be budded off from the inner part of the anthers, each one perfect, each bearing the impress of the whole tree! And from the inner wall of the seed pod, you know, from the inner wall of the cradle, must be budded off the ovules, each one perfect of its kind, and each bearing the power to produce again the whole tree."





"I thought the pollen held half the



tree, and the ovule the other half," said Christobel.

Again the fairy tinkled out that laugh like a chime of little bells. "More than half, My Dear, more than half. Each is all, yet each without the other is naught. Each must have in it the idea of the whole, yet each would surely die without the other. It is a wonderfully hard task, My Dear."

"I don't see how you can!" suddenly exclaimed Christobel.

The fairy burst into a laugh as wild and merry as the west wind. "Oh, it is easy, so easy."

"But—I thought you said it was hard."

"Did I? Well, that is when you think about it. To do it is so easy! You find it easy to grow, don't you, My Dear? But if you stopped to think about it—to think what it really is to grow—I doubt if you could grow an inch in a thousand years. Oh, it is easy to do."

"And think of all those precious pollen grains wasted on the bees, who merely eat them up," sighed Christobel.

"Not wasted, you child of the blessed earth; not wasted; no, not wasted. Many extra pollen grains there must be, to make sure that some of them find the waiting ovules. And all the rest—how pleasant it is that many of them lie spread in the chalice of the flower, ambrosia for gauzy winged visitors. How can you call them wasted when they serve so lovely a use."

IX

BREAD AND HONEY

"YOU are pleased with everything," said Christobel, laughing. "I think you love to work."

"Love to work!" echoed the fairy with so sweet a laugh that a flash of sunshine seemed to break over the earth. "I should think I do love to work! Why, do you know, I am work; I could not live a minute if I stopped working, neither could you, for that matter, though you may not know it. There is nothing so beautiful as work. Why, work, My Dear, is life itself, do you know that? But to return to ovules and pollen — yes, to make a pollen grain is like making a tree, a perfect tree, the size of a pollen grain."

"But is the pollen grain a little tree? How can it be when it is made of only one cell, while the tree has to be built up of

millions of cells of all shapes and sizes—at least that is the way my botany book puts it."

The fairy laughed until the leaves and flowers danced all over the apple tree.

"Now that is the hard part, if any part could be hard—to make a perfect tree and yet not make it at all!"

"But you don't make a real tree; you make something that can grow into a tree," reasoned Christobel.

"Well, what's the difference?" asked the fairy, shaking with merriment.

"I'm sure I don't know," admitted Christobel, laughing too. "But I am glad, since you don't mind making it, that there is pollen enough for the bees and the wasps and all the dear little folks with wings; what would they do without it? and nectar, too, for them to drink and carry home to the hives. I wonder how apple-blossom honey tastes."

"I have tasted it," said the fairy, "many a time, but that will not help you, for I know you will have to taste for yourself.

But this I can tell you, when you taste the fragrance of apple blossoms on your tongue and smell the warmth of a spring day and feel the sunshine of June in your heart, why then you may know you are eating apple-blossom honey."

"Oh, my!" exclaimed Christobel, "I must coax the bees for a taste! Father will not take away their early honey; he says they need it themselves, and so we have to wait for clover honey; apple-blossom honey! Perhaps some day the bees will give me a taste."

"And there is the incense to prepare," continued the fairy; "let us not forget that; the sweet perfumes that bear the invitations far and near to the friends of the flowers to come to the feast."

"Perfumery must be about as hard to make as the pollen, I should think," said Christobel.

"Oh, no," laughed the fairy; "the fragrance of the flowers is nothing at all."

"But it is so small you can't see it!"

How the fairy laughed! "Unseen to

you, My Dear, but to me, well, as real as a ripe apple is to you. Size doesn't count, you know. It is only the way you are made that makes other things seem large or small. Now you probably think that I am small?" The fairy stopped and twinkled at Christobel, who turned quite red and began to stammer out something, but the fairy only laughed gaily and went on: "No, I am not small; and you are not large. Nothing is really large or really small; it all depends!" And the lively little creature began to laugh again, and laughed until the clouds in the sky shone back as if laughing too.

X

APPLES AND APPLE SEEDS

"THERE are a good many kinds of apples," said Christobel at last; "even in this orchard there are quite a number. How can you remember to make each itself always? What is the difference, anyway? Now, what is the difference between—well, between a pippin and a Baldwin? We have both, you know, and they are as different as can be."

The fairy laughed again until the apple blossoms danced on the tree and the west wind stooped suddenly down and kissed them.

"That really isn't my concern," she said, as soon as she had sobered down a little, "and I don't know the secret, My Dear. Each apple tree can help itself, you know. If it couldn't, I couldn't help it. It remembers. What its parents were it remembers to become itself. It couldn't grow without

my help, and I couldn't help it unless it could grow. Do you see?"

"Not very well," said Christobel.

"Well, at least you are not alone in that. Even grown people have difficulty. Apple seeds remember something. But sometimes an apple seed gets a new idea. Now don't ask me how or where, for I don't know. It gets it out of space, somehow. Space is full of ideas, you know. Indeed, space is nothing but ideas; all you need do is to leave an opening for them to leak in. Some apple seeds let in ideas. Then you get a new kind of apple."

"Is that the way it came about?" asked Christobel, opening her eyes in astonishment.

"Well, yes and no. Sometimes it is the grown tree that gets the idea. Sometimes a tree will bear a new kind of apple on one of its limbs, and not on the others."

"Oh, I know about that," said Christobel, eagerly. "One of our trees does that. One limb had a new kind of apple last year, but it wasn't as good as the rest."

"Yes, these new things are sometimes better, sometimes worse. When they are better, they are likely to be cared for by the people and kept; where they are worse, nobody helps them to keep on, and in time they die out. Apples were not always what they are today," the fairy went on. "They were not always big and beautiful and sweet and juicy. They owe their present perfection to man's efforts. Would you like me to tell you how it came about?"

"Oh, do!" cried Christobel, eagerly. So the fairy went on.

"Once upon a time apples were not large nor very juicy nor very good flavored. Oh, but they were sour and puckery and hard, too. Indeed, the best of them were little better than crab apples. I remember when they were like that—not a single really good apple in all the world.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Christobel. "What did folks do for apples in those days?"

"They went without," laughed the fairy. "They went without a good many things

in those days. Well, as I was saying, there were only crab apples."

"Where did the seeds come from for real apple trees to grow out of?" interrupted Christobel.

"That is just what I am coming to," went on the fairy. "They did not come from anywhere, or rather they came from everywhere. I just took the best trees and cared for them."

"You did it?" interrupted Christobel again. "Why, I thought you just said—"

"Yes, I know I said that people did it, and so they did. Still, in spite of that, it was I who did it, though in rather a roundabout way. You see, I put it into the minds of the people so that they watched the trees and saved the best and cared for them and kept on in this way until in course of time—oh, in thousands and thousands of years—men had orchards of fine apple trees, such as you have today. Oh, yes, by selection and care you can get almost anything you want in the way of an apple. Every family could have its own special

apple, if it wanted to. You could have a new apple and give it your family name, if you wanted to."

"Really?" asked Christobel.

"To be sure you could."

"Could I have just the kind I wanted?"

"Within limits you could. Of course, you couldn't start a new kind yourself. Nobody on earth could do that. But when a new kind appeared you could keep it. Right now there is a chance for you. On this very tree is a limb that bears wonderfully good apples."

"Oh, I know!" exclaimed Christobel. "I know. It is the big limb over my head. It has such good apples every year! Father is going to take off some of the buds and plant them in another apple tree, and he says they will grow just as if they were on their own tree, and bear these good apples."

"In time," said the fairy, "he could have a whole orchard of these good apple trees, and he could name them the Christobel apple if he wanted to."

"Dear me, so he could," said Christobel. "I never thought of that."

"Look out!" cried the fairy and vanished, as a whole skyful of petals fell like snow over Christobel, who started and stared and then laughed merrily as she caught sight of Robert's mischievous face looking down from the limb above her.

"Tell me what the fairy said," he demanded.

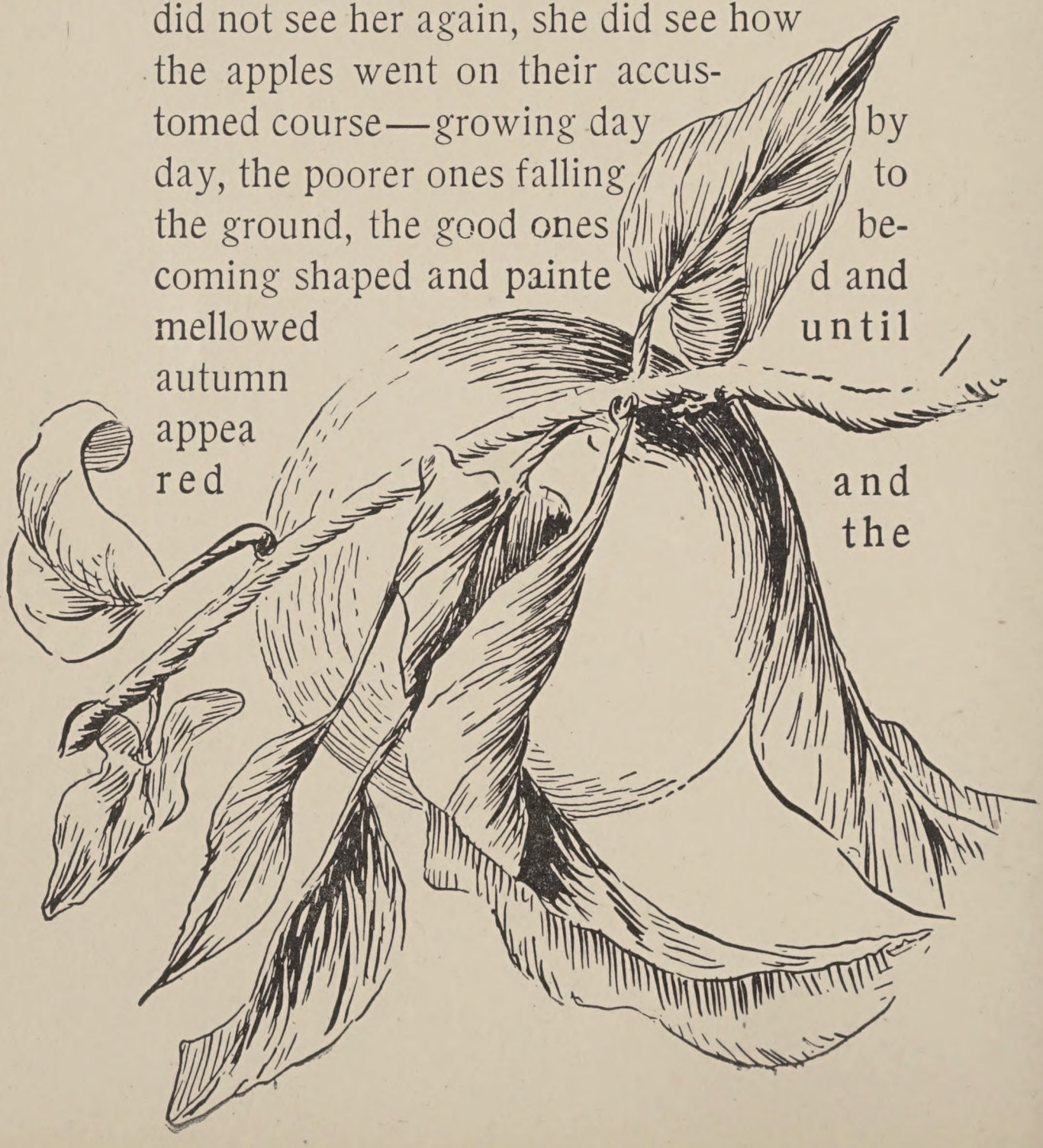
"I will, if you won't say I've been asleep."

"I won't say it, no matter what I may think," was the discreet reply.

XI

RIPE APPLES

CHRISTOBEL watched all summer for the Apple-Tree Sprite, but although she did not see her again, she did see how the apples went on their accustomed course—growing day by day, the poorer ones falling to the ground, the good ones becoming shaped and painted and mellowed until autumn appeared and the



leaves began to change color. When the earth was all in a blaze one splendid October day, Christobel climbed into the crotch of the old apple tree, hoping that the fairy would come again, as she had hoped so many times before that summer. And this time the fairy did come. But Christobel hardly knew her, she had changed so. She was dressed all in red and gold, and her hair was fluffy like dandelion silk and her skin was as white as milk and her eyes like shining stars.

"You see," said the fairy, "my work is about done, and I am getting rested. I feel quite young again."

"You look so," said Christobel, heartily. "But people generally look rested before they have done hard work, and tired afterwards."

"Oh, people are different," said the fairy with her merry laugh. "It rests us to work, you know. I feel quite old and worn out in the spring after resting all winter, not that I rest entirely even then; but in the fall when my beautiful apples are all but

finished, then is my very happiest time. You don't know how it rests me just to go about and look at the apples on the trees."

"I should think it would," said Christobel, "but are you all done?"

"Not quite," said the fairy. "You see most of the apples are yet on the trees. Unless the farmer comes and gathers them I shall have to loosen all the stems so they can fall to the ground where the seeds can grow."

"But the seeds don't grow," said Christobel. "The hired man pulls up everything but the grass that grows under the apple trees."

"That is not my fault," said the fairy, "nor my concern. I have to stay about and loosen the apples when the time comes, if they are not taken off before I get around to it."

"I suppose," said Christobel, "that you loosen the apples just as you did the petals?"

"Yes," said the fairy, "but you can imagine it takes more strength, or rather more

time to undo the end of that hard, woody stem. And now," the fairy went on, "you people must look after the apple trees and save them from the canker grubs that are lying at their roots."

"Can you not do that, too?" asked Christobel.

The fairy shook her head and sent sparkles all through the air. "No, indeed, the canker folks do not belong to my kingdom. I get the frost and the rain to help me conquer sometimes, and sometimes the little fungus people, but they have their own affairs to attend to and are not always ready when I need them. You see, I can help the wild apple trees better, but these fine apples that man has made are very tender and require more care than I can give."

"So that is why father has to spray the trees and dig codling moths out of the roots and burn the tents of the caterpillars in early summer," said Christobel.

"Exactly so," said the fairy.

"It was very good of you to do so well by our orchard this year," said Christobel.

"Now we shall have apples to eat all winter and a barrel of sweet cider and plenty of pies and apple sauce and some apples left to give away, and a great many for father to sell; yes, you have been very good to us."

"I should like," said the fairy, "to have your trees loaded with apples every year, but that I cannot do, for it is not the nature of the apple tree to bear without a resting year between."

"Orange trees do," said Christobel, who had an aunt living in Florida who sent them a box of oranges every Christmas.

"Orange trees are different," said the fairy. "Apple trees have only learned to bear a full crop of apples every other year. You look and you will see the apple blossoms bursting out of the buds at the end of last year's branches. Well, the next year, instead of apples, twigs grow, and out of these come again apples."

Christobel looked up into the apple tree over her head and it was covered all over with red apples, and they smelled so good she wanted to eat one. As she put out her

hand she heard her father's voice quite close to her ear.

"See," he said, laughing, "what a great big apple I have found lodged in the crotch of the tree! Shall I put it in the bottom of the barrel, or on top?" and he caught her by the arm as though he were going to drop her down into the apple barrel.

"Oh, on top!" screamed Christobel, laughing and struggling to get free.

Yes, her father and his men had come to gather the apples, and her father was standing on the rung of a tall ladder that reached way up in the tree.

"I didn't hear you put that ladder up at all," said Christobel.

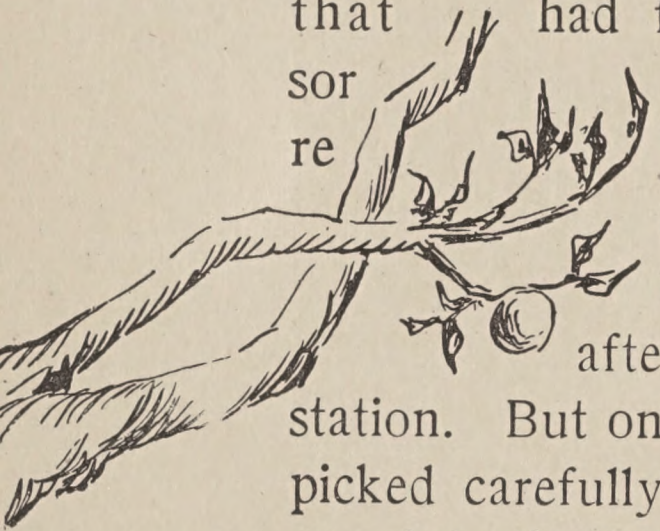
"No, I should think not. Lazy bones! sleeping in the daytime like a little owl, and likely enough dreaming about apple-tree fairies."

But Christobel shook her head. She was sure she had not been dreaming, and, anyway, the fairy story, whether dreamed or not, was as true as could be.

XII

CHRISTOBEL PASSES HER EXAMINATION

DAY after day Christobel's father and the hired men picked ripe apples. When school was out Christobel and the boys helped. They picked up the apples that had fallen to the ground and sorted them into the barrels standing ready. Then came old gray Dobbin with the wagon and pulled load after load away to the railway station. But only the apples that the men picked carefully from the trees were put into the barrels to be carted away.



"How I wish I knew who was going to eat them," thought Christobel. "How I hope the little children in the big,



crowded cities will like them. I wish they could see the dear trees they grow on."

The apples that fell to the ground were carefully sorted and only those without bruise or blemish were taken home to the cellar and stored away.

"If any are bruised they will soon rot and spoil the rest," father said.

So into the cellar bins went the good apples, and when the work was done Robert called to his sister.

"Come, Christobel," he called; "come down cellar as fast as ever you can."

Christobel ran down the steps to the large dry and airy room where the apples were stored.

"Did you ever smell anything to beat it?" demanded Robert.

Christobel shut her eyes and drew in a long, blissful breath. "Nothing in the world smells sweeter to me than ripe apples," she said. "My! my! doesn't this cellar smell good enough to eat!"

"Now shut your eyes and don't peek," said Robert loftily; "I am going to see if

you can pass your apple examination. Will you promise not to peek? Or shall I have to tie a handkerchief over your eyes?"

"I promise," laughed Christobel. So Robert turned her around three times, then led her a few steps and said,

"Stoop over a little and smell. What kind of apples are in this bin?"

"Baldwins!" said Christobel promptly. Robert grunted assent and led her a little farther.

"Now what?"

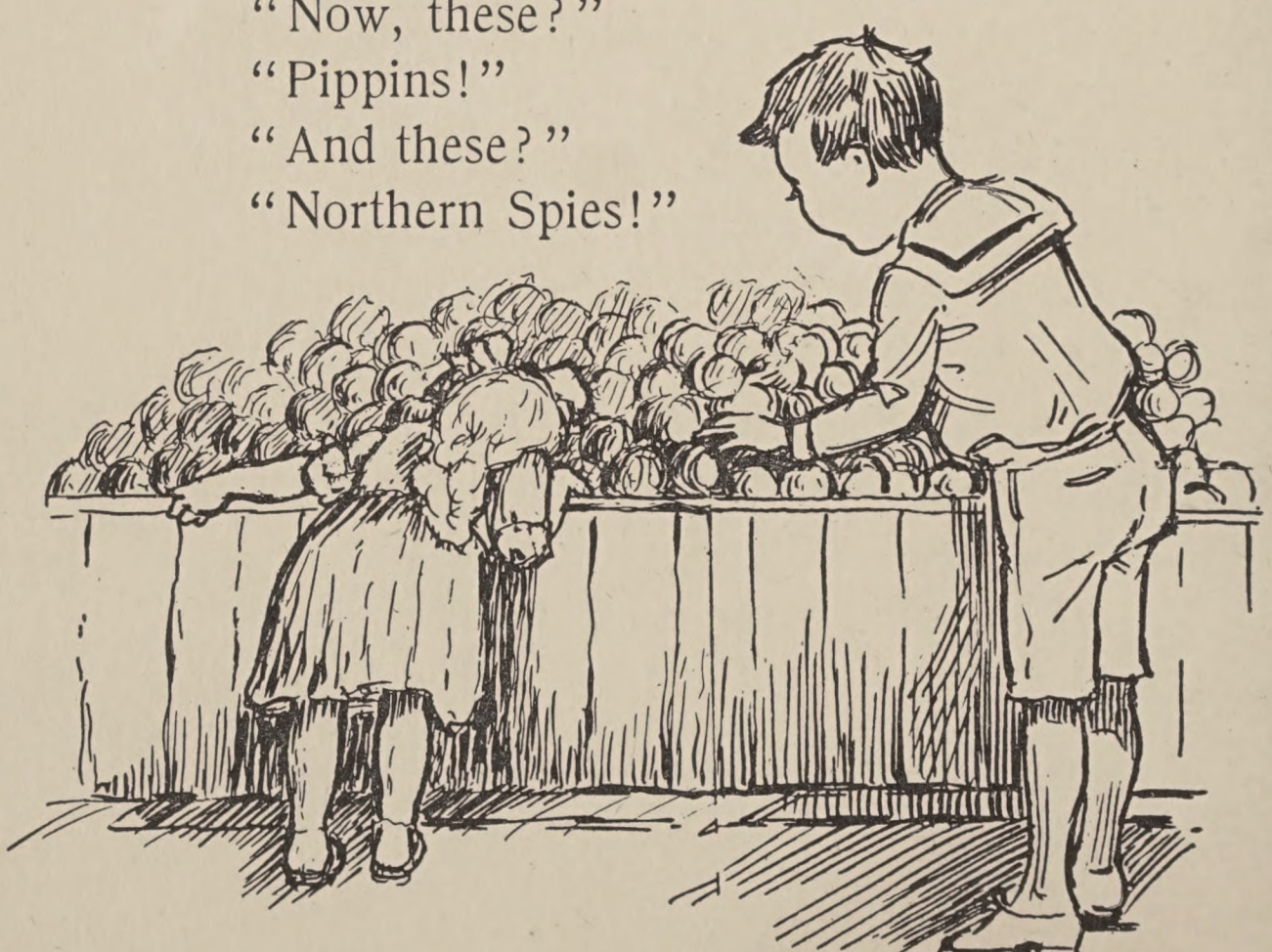
Christobel took one long ecstatic sniff—"Spitzenbergs!"

"Now, these?"

"Pippins!"

"And these?"

"Northern Spies!"



And so Robert led her around to all the bins and Christobel guessed right every time but one. The greenings were not ripe enough to perfume the air and Christobel called them something else.

"Well," said Robert, "you have passed very well. I will give you a graduating diploma, and you can have all the apples you want to eat all winter—all but greenings."

"I can have all the apples I want without asking you, you old tease; they are father's apples," and Christobel began to spin around like a whirligig; "but I am glad I passed my examination," she added, stopping and laughing.

"So am I," said Robert solemnly. "I am glad to be able to be proud of you."

XIII

THANKSGIVING

WHEN Thanksgiving came Christobel got up in the morning to find the ground all white with snow and big feathery flakes flying in the air.

"Now for the fun!" she cried, jumping up and down. Right after breakfast she went out with the other children, Bennie and Robert and little Sue, and they threw snowballs, and drew each other on their new sleds and coasted down the long slope of the meadow while the wind came along with his icy switches and joined in the frolic and switched their cheeks until they were as red as fire.

Then the aunts and uncles and cousins came to dinner, and oh, how good the Thanksgiving turkey tasted! And how much pie they all ate! a little piece of mince pie and a big piece of apple pie for

each child. Then there were games and fun and then the sleighs came with jingling bells and went away with the company.

For supper they had apples baked before the open fire. Each person chose an apple and set it in front of the coals, and as it got soft on one side he turned it around and kept on turning it until it was soft all over and the juice began to sizzle out. When this happened he put the apple on a saucer and ate it with a spoon. If it was too sour a little sugar was sprinkled on it.

But Christobel's apple was not too sour. It was just right — just sweet enough, and just sour enough. You see she had chosen it from the fragrant bin that held the apples from the Baldwin tree in whose crotch she had lain while the Apple-Tree Fairy told her the story of her life work.

"Father," said Christobel, "tell us a story."

"Yes!" shouted all the children, "tell us a story!"

"Well, what kind of story?" asked

father, beginning to peel another yellow apple, for he had already eaten one.

"Let it be an apple story," said Christobel.

"Yes, an apple story!" shouted the rest of the children.

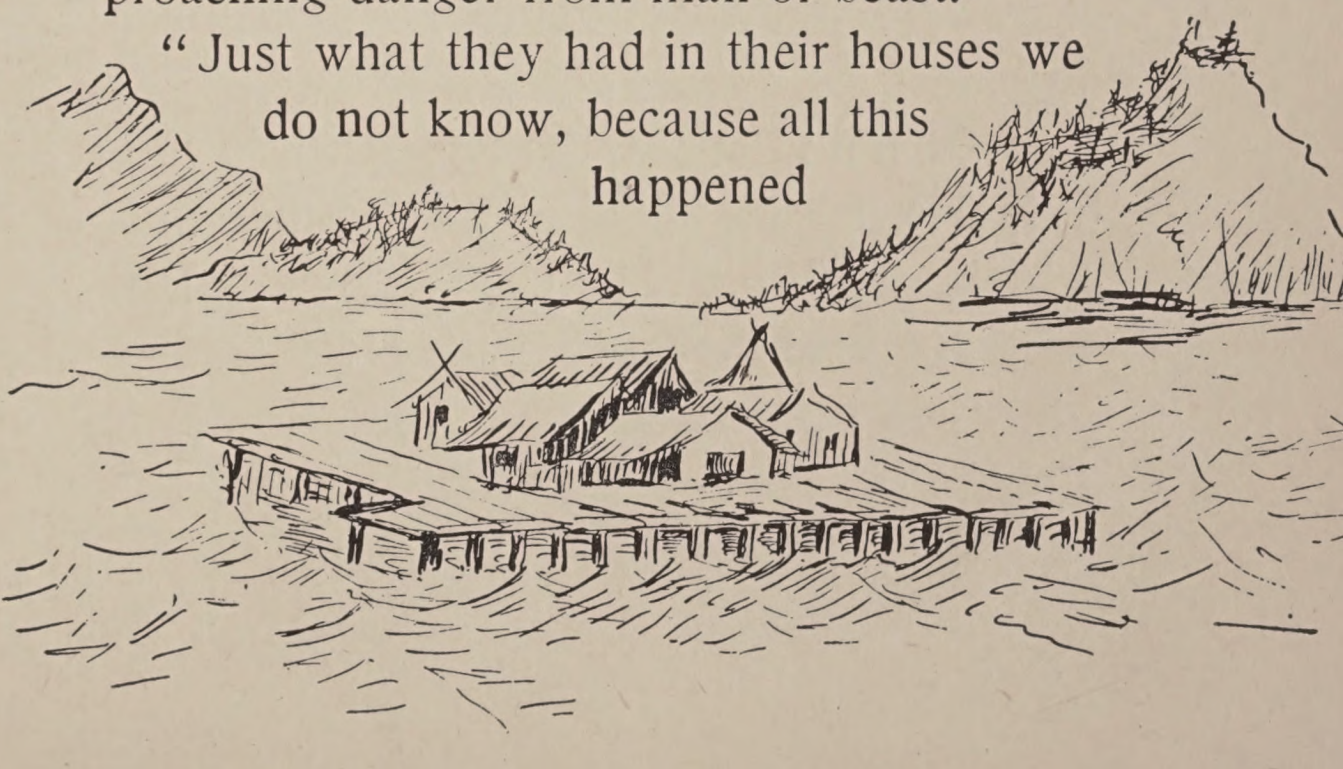
So father began.

XIV

THE APPLE STORY

"ONCE upon a time some children lived with their father and mother in a very funny house. It stood out in the middle of a lake on piles driven into the bottom of the lake. You could only get to it in boats, and there was a ladder that went from the water up to the door. They lived this way because it was long ago and they had to protect themselves from their enemies. There were no policemen and no laws and nobody to warn them of approaching danger from man or beast.

"Just what they had in their houses we do not know, because all this happened



so long ago, and just how they lived we do not know, but we know some things they had, for they dropped them into the water and the mud covered them and caked hard around them and preserved them, and long, long after the lake had dried up and people were no longer obliged to live over the water to protect themselves, men went and dug where the lakes had been, and found the things that had so long lain buried. And what among other things do you suppose they found?"

"Tin soldiers!" shrieked Bennie, with his eyes popping out.

"No, you remember this is an apple story, my son; they found apples buried in the mud."

"Were they fit to eat?" demanded Robert.

"No, not fit to eat, but nevertheless very valuable, for they told us just as though it had been printed in a book how in that long-ago time the Swiss Lake Dwellers had apples to eat, just as we have. Now it is time to say good-night."

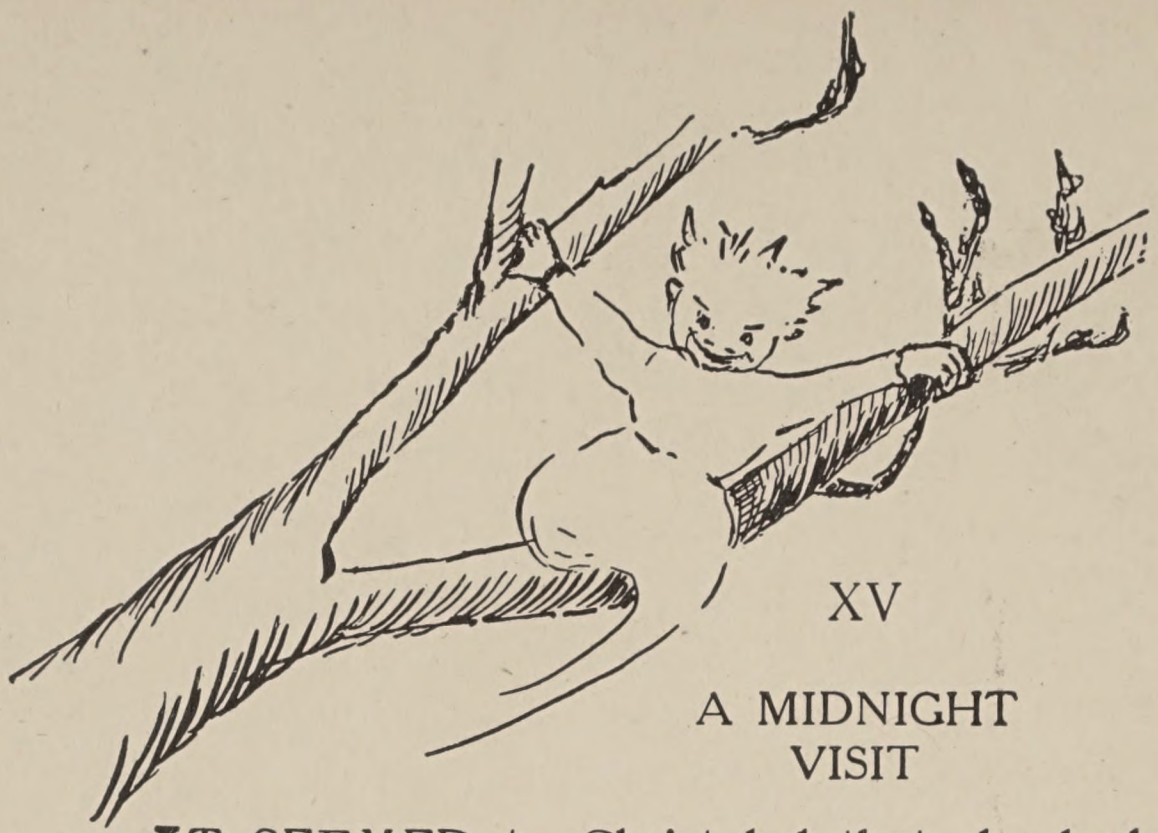
"May I say a quotation first?" demanded Robert the tease as he tweaked one end of the big ribbon bow that adorned Christobel's head like an enormous butterfly, and of which she was very proud.

"Well, what is it?" demanded Christobel suspiciously.

"'How we dried apples swim,'" squeaked Robert in a funny little voice, and made for the door only to be caught by father, who said he had a quotation, too, and repeated, "'A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver.'"

Robert laughed. "I don't know which way to take that," he said.

Then the children kissed their parents good-night and went off to bed, and they were so tired and sleepy after the fun in the snow and the big Thanksgiving dinner and the games they had played with their cousins that they hardly knew how they got to bed.



XV

A MIDNIGHT VISIT

IT SEEMED to Christobel that she had only slept a few minutes when she was wakened by a gentle tug at her little finger.

"What is it?" asked Christobel, sitting up and looking around.

"It is only I; don't be frightened"—and there, if you please, on the corner of the pillow, all wrapped in a snowflake shawl, sat the Sprite of the apple tree.

"I declare!" said Christobel, rubbing her eyes. "My! How rosy you are; as red and shiny as a Baldwin apple!"

"Little to wonder at in that," said the fairy with her own merry laugh that, however, sounded quite faint and hollow as compared with her summer laugh. "Any-

one who has to stay out in the snow without work enough to keep her from being tired may well turn red. But that is not the point. What I want to know is whether you would like to go out and see what I do to the apple tree in the winter time."

"That I would!" cried Christobel. "I would like it above all things, but I can't. Mummy wouldn't let me. Besides, I have on my nighty, and my feet are bare."

"Oh, that won't matter," said the fairy; "just let me wrap you up once in a thick snow mantle and you will be as snug as a bug in a rug. No cold in the right kind of snow mantle, I tell you. Are you sure your mother wouldn't let you?"

"Perfectly sure," said Christobel decidedly. "Mummy never lets me out in the night, not unless she or father has tight hold of my hand."

"Perhaps you don't want to go?"

"Oh, but I do!" said Christobel, almost ready to cry.

"Well, that's all right, then. You go back to bed and I'll bring the tree here."

"But I'm already in bed—" began Christobel, but the fairy interrupted, "Then stay there and watch." And Christobel saw the little old woman, for such the fairy had become again, jump out of the window and go across the snowy yard and over the snowy fence to where the apple tree stood up to its waist in snow, and with the snow piled like a cloak over all its branches, just as Christobel had seen it that morning when she was out coasting.

The next thing she knew, the apple tree was right there in her own room, that had to be stretched a good deal to accommodate it.

"There now, Mummy won't mind your getting up in the crotch right here in your own room. See how cozy I'll make you," and the little old woman took Christobel up and wrapped her in a warm woolly blanket that looked like snow but was as warm as toast, and set her up in the crotch.

"Now look!"

"Well, did you ever!" exclaimed Christobel in delight, for the little old woman

put her tiny fingers into a twig that became transparent like glass, and Christobel saw her building up oh, such tiny cells into such tiny, tiny buds, just under the bark of the twig, and enlarging the little buds that had been started the summer before on the ends of the twigs.

"Ho!" she said, "this is my winter work; very slow, you see, for the growing material is all spread out so thin, and most of it has settled down into the roots to be safe from Jack Frost."

"Do you mean the tree is really growing in the winter time?"

"It looks so," laughed the fairy. "You see I cannot do nothing, I should be tired to death, and perhaps I might forget how, so I do a little on warm days and after the apples are off in the fall. It is not much, but it helps, I can tell you. It helps to get things started before the spring rush comes on. What with new twigs and so many leaves and so many bunches of blossoms to look after all at once, I can tell you I am too busy to think of being tired. But there

is such a thing as having too much to do, which is why I help along by doing what I can through the winter."

"I thought the sap went down into the roots for the winter," said Christobel, thinking of her botany book.

"So a good deal does, but not all, as you can see by bending a live twig and a dead one. There is a difference, isn't there?"

"Oh, yes," said Christobel, "a great difference; a dead twig snaps but a live one bends."

"Yes, that is so; and now if you look at the apple trees carefully you will see next year's buds all started at the ends of the twigs. I did most of that during the summer. But this year there will not be many flower buds — you remember why, I hope?"

"Yes; because next year we must have new twigs for the year after's flowers to grow on."

"Very good; but of course there were a few new twigs last year, so there will be a few blossoms this year. Now go to sleep, for that is all I have to show you tonight."



XVI

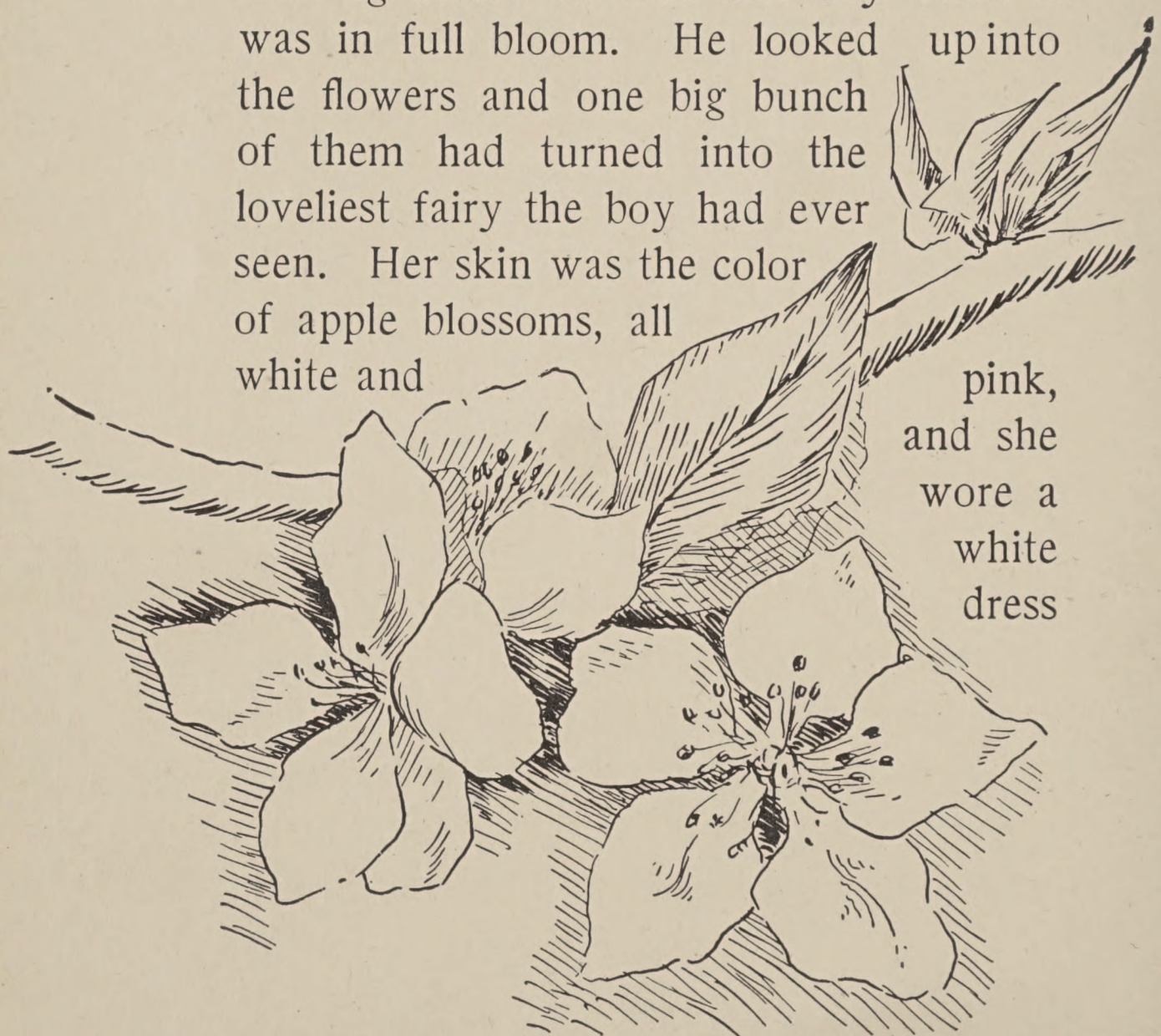
FATHER'S STORY

"THERE is one thing about that dear old apple tree the fairy has not told you, I think," said father the next evening after Christobel had told the family about her visit as they were sitting in the firelight just before bedtime. Father, mother, Robert, Bennie, and Christobel were there, but little Sue was not. She had to have her bread

and milk and go to bed before supper every night, excepting Thanksgiving and Christmas and on her birthday.

"Do tell us about it!" and the children gave their chairs a little hitch towards father.

"It happened long ago before any of you were born," said father. "A boy was walking under the tree one day when it was in full bloom. He looked up into the flowers and one big bunch of them had turned into the loveliest fairy the boy had ever seen. Her skin was the color of apple blossoms, all white and pink, and she wore a white dress



with a pink sash, and had dear little slippers on her feet, and her eyes were as blue as the sky and as bright as the stars. She was so lovely that it made the boy's heart beat fast, and he didn't know whether to run away somewhere or stay where he was. Finally the fairy up in the tree spied him, and picked some apple blossoms and threw them down at him, and he caught them and kissed them and—"

"Oh, Father!" interrupted mother, laughing and blushing. And how all the children laughed! They had heard that same story many times before, and it always ended that way—just at that point mother always said, "Oh, Father!" and father always stopped and would not go on.

"It was mother up in the apple tree," said Bennie.

"Yes, mother was the fairy princess," assented father.

"And father," said Robert, "was the fairy prince who came and carried her off out of the dragon's den, for the tree was the dragon with its big coily limbs."

"There is another apple story; please tell that," begged Christobel.

"Yes, about the apples of Hesperides," shouted Robert and Bennie in chorus.

XVII

THE APPLES OF HESPERIDES

"WELL," said father, "this is how it was. You know the Gardens of the Hesperides, way off in the sunset sea, the most beautiful deep blue sea with a flaming sky over it? And the islands themselves—how can anyone tell how splendid they were! as green as emerald with the soft grass that covered them, and the grass was dotted with primroses and crocuses that bloomed all the time, and there were daisies and buttercups and forget-me-nots and rose bushes along the walks, and there were lilacs and—"

"Don't forget the—" interrupted Robert.

"Now you wait," said father; "I'm coming to that. Where was I? Oh, yes; lilacs and soft green bushes in one corner all covered with red and white flat pods,

and each red pod had in it a red peppermint drop, and each white pod a white peppermint drop."

"Um!" said Christobel, smacking her lips.

"And there were other bushes," said Bennie, prompting his father.

"Yes," went on father, "there were other bushes that bore—let me see—small, round, brown potatoes."

"No!" shrieked all the children at once, "chocolate drops; you said chocolate drops."

"Oh, yes," agreed father, "chocolate drops, so it was. And currant bushes that bore candy kisses, and vines that climbed over the windows of the beautiful ivory and glass palace that stood in the midst, and the vines that climbed over the children's window bore beautiful blue flowers and pink ones and white ones that smelled as sweet as possible, and when a good child picked a flower, if the good child was hungry, the flower turned into a luscious gum drop, or a big juicy plum, or even a currant

bun, but if a naughty child picked one, it crumbled into dry ashes that smelled like a sulphur match."

"Ugh!" groaned Christobel.

"But you may be sure," went on father, "that the children in the beautiful palace were not often naughty. But the best part of the Island of Hesperides was the trees—such tall and elegant shapes as they had! There were tall palms that waved their great fronds all summer and kept the air cool, and other palms as beautiful as a dream that had great bunches of ripe dates on them all the time, but some had cocoanuts, and some bore little cans of guava jelly. And there were nut trees that bore peanuts—"

"Peanuts don't grow on trees," cried Bennie, holding up both hands in his eagerness.

"But this is in the Island of the Hesperides, you know," said his father seriously; "great nut trees covered with nicely roasted peanuts, and others with salted almonds, and others with pecan candy bars, and

others with wreaths of gold and scarlet flowers.

"But the best of all were the apple trees. They were very tall, and their limbs were so broad and stretched out so long that you could get up and take a walk on them when it rained and you did not want to wet your little pink slippers. I mean, of course, when the children in the ivory palace wanted to take a walk without wetting their little pink slippers. And these apple trees had wonderful leaves made of silver filigree that was always bright, and the silver leaves were enameled with green enamel in the sweetest way. You never saw anything so grand and wonderful as these apple trees in the Garden of the Hesperides. And the apples themselves were of pure gold, and had magic powers at that.

"You can imagine that everybody wanted to get some of these apples. But not everybody could get them, because the apple trees stood in the midst of an enchanted garden surrounded by an enchanted hedge and guarded by dragons—

and dragons, you know, are always enchanted."

"Now come the heroes," whispered Bennie, settling down with his chin on his fist.

"Yes," said father, "now come the heroes. But don't you think bedtime has come along, too?"

"No, father," replied Bennie seriously, "you surely are mistaken. How impolite it would be to go and leave the heroes just as they arrive."

"Hm!" said father, "I trust you will remain as polite as that when next you are requested to pick up chips for the woodbox."

Bennie's eyes twinkled and father went on. "Hercules, you know, had as one of his tasks getting some of the golden apples from the Garden of Hesperides. It was harder than other tasks because, besides getting them, he had to find out where they were kept."

"The queen of the gods had hidden them," volunteered Christobel.

"Yes," added Robert, "Juno was queen

of the gods, and she hid the lovely gold apples that had been given to her on her wedding day by the goddess of the earth. She was afraid of losing them, I suppose."

"Go on, father," said Bennie.

"Hercules did not know where to hunt for them," father went on. "So he finally crossed over to Mount Atlas in Africa, where the great Titan named Atlas was holding the heavens up on his shoulders."

"He had to stand there and hold up the heavens day and night, year in and year out," added Christobel, "because he had warred against the gods, and this was his punishment."

"Yes," assented father, "and Atlas was the father of the nymphs who guarded the golden apples of Hesperides. So Hercules thought that if anybody could help him to get some of the apples, Atlas could. When he told what he wanted, Atlas, whose back ached with holding up the heavens, said he would gladly go to the lovely islands in the sunset sea if only he could get somebody to hold up his burden, but heavy as

it was he would not be willing to let go and have the heavens come crashing down and destroying everybody, himself included. Besides, he couldn't leave if he wanted to, because if the heavens began to lean ever so little the gods would be after him, and no knowing what they would do next. It is better to endure the ills you have than fly to those you know not of, he said."

"I thought Shakespeare said that," commented Robert, who was in the highest class in school.

"Yes, but couldn't Atlas say it first?" demanded Bennie. "Go on, father."

"Well," said father, "to make a long story short, Hercules offered to hold up the heavens for Atlas if he would go and get the apples. You may be sure Atlas was glad enough to shift his load to other shoulders, and when this was successfully done without loosening a single star or disarranging the moon, off went Atlas after the golden apples while poor Hercules had to stand like a statue holding up the heavens."

"Tell how Atlas got past the dragon,

and all the things he saw, and how he finally got the apples," begged Christobel.

"Yes, do!" eagerly added the boys, for the children were always anxious to lengthen the story as bedtime approached.

"No," said father, "you know all that as well as I do. You know how Atlas went to visit his daughters, and what a beautiful time he had; how the dragons licked his hands just like pet dogs because he was the father of the lovely nymphs whose slaves they were; and how Atlas, when the time came to return, casually put a few golden apples in his pocket when the dragons were not looking, and took them to Hercules. Of course he did not want to take up his load again, any more than you want to go to bed, but circumstances made it necessary, just as circumstances now make it necessary for all of you to be off to bed—so good-night and happy dreams."

XVIII

MORE STORIES

"THERE are other apple stories," said Christobel the next time they were sitting together about the fire. It was a snowy afternoon and each one had a big yellow apple to eat. They had all chosen bright yellow Pippins in honor of the golden apples of Hesperides.

"Yes, there is the apple of discord," said mother, looking up from her sewing basket.

"Yes," assented Christobel reluctantly, "we know too much about that. It got thrown in amongst us this morning when we all went to quarrelling over who should first have the new magazine."

"But the mythological story is much prettier!" declared Robert. "Tell it, Mummy."

"You know how it came about," began

mother. "Minerva, the goddess of wisdom, Venus, the goddess of love, and Juno, queen of the gods, were once at a splendid wedding where all the gods and goddesses were invited excepting the goddess of discord, who was so crabbed and ugly that nobody wanted her about. But she was very angry at not being invited, and came anyway, and, as generally happens when she is about, trouble began. When the guests were all enjoying themselves, and Hebe was passing about the delightful nectar in crystal cups, and everybody was taking a second slice of ambrosia, the ugly goddess of discord threw a golden apple among them with this inscription engraved on one side: 'For the fairest.' 'This must be meant for me,' said Venus, blushing. She had reason to think so, as she was called also the goddess of beauty.

"'I,' said Juno, who had been greatly flattered by the gods, 'surely think it belongs to me,' and then Minerva, the goddess of wisdom, who showed herself anything but wise in this matter, put out her

hand and took the apple as if to look at it, and then hid it in her sleeve, saying, 'I am sure it was meant for me.'

"Upon this the blessed gods all took sides, so that it was necessary to get the matter decided. Jupiter, in his position as king, could have decided on the spot, but he did not want to, as you can well imagine, for by favoring one of them he would offend the two other lovely goddesses. So he told them to go to the beautiful shepherd Paris, who was watching his flocks on Mount Ida, and get him to decide. It seems that the three goddesses tried all they could to buy the favor of Paris, each promising him the best within her gift, if he would decide in her favor."

"Minerva promised that he should become a great warrior and win deathless fame and glory," said Christobel.

"Juno promised jewels and gold and power over great nations," added Bennie.

"And Venus promised that he should have the most beautiful wife in all the world," went on Robert, for they all knew

the story quite well, having heard it often before.

"Yes," said mother, "and you know who won, for of course Paris gave the apple to Venus, which was fair enough, for she was the goddess of beauty."

"But the others were offended," said Bennie, "and made up their minds to pay Paris off for slighting them and giving the prize to Venus."

"Yes, go on, Bennie," and mother smiled at him.

"Well, Venus made Paris run away with Helen of Troy, who was the most beautiful woman in the world, and the consequence of that was the Trojan War which we read all about last winter."

"Yes, indeed; what a good time we had over that Trojan War," and Robert laughed gleefully at the memory.

XIX

ATALANTA

"THERE is another pretty apple story taken from mythology," saying which father settled down and the children gathered about him. "I mean the one about Atalanta."

"Yes, yes, tell us," begged the children, all but little Sue who was too busy picking the seeds out of the core of her apple to bother about people so far distant as the old gods and goddesses.

"She will listen when she is older," said father, and began the story of Atalanta.

"Atalanta was a beautiful huntress who rejected all suitors for her hand because an oracle had foretold that if she married, dire misfortune would befall her. As she was beautiful and high-born she had many suitors, and to escape them all she made a decree that she would wed the hero who

should win a footrace with her, but whosoever tried and failed should be put to death. You can imagine she was not troubled with many suitors after that! Still, occasionally some rash youth would try, and always met his fate because nobody could outrun Atalanta. But one day Hippomenes, the umpire, fell so in love with the beautiful huntress that he decided to try his own luck, although he had just watched some other youths defeated and condemned to death.

"Well, never mind, he would try anyway. He was so in love that he felt he would die without her, so it would be more glorious to die trying to win her.

"Atalanta felt very sorry that such a beautiful youth as Hippomenes should perish for her sake, yet, if he would, he would, and she could not help it. And so they started as fleet as the wind. But just as their feet left the ground, Hippomenes addressed a prayer to Venus, the goddess of love, begging her to help him.

"Now, Venus was sitting in a lovely gar-

den in the island of Cyprus when the prayer came. It was warm and sweet on this her own island, and behind her shone the ivory pillars of her temple. When the prayer came flying in like a breathless bird, she looked out over the sea where Hippomenes and Atalanta were just starting on the fateful race, and the heart of the goddess was moved with pity for the beautiful youth. So she reached up to a golden tree covered with golden apples, whose branches hung over her head, the leaves of pure gold sheltering her from the golden rays of the sun. She gathered three apples wondrously beautiful and of pure gold and put them into Hippomenes' hand and whispered to him how to use them.

"Like two swift arrows, Hippomenes and Atalanta sped over the course. They seemed to fly or float along, so lightly did their feet touch the earth. Impelled by love, Hippomenes seemed in fair way to win, the onlookers cheered, and Atalanta herself half forgot her vow and almost hoped that he would win.

"But the race was long and Hippomenes began to lose breath when, with a strong effort, he threw one of the golden apples right in front of Atalanta who, astonished at its beauty, stayed her steps a moment to pick it up. When she heard the uproar of the on-lookers and discovered that Hippomenes had passed her in the race, she shot forward faster than ever and soon outdistanced him. But again he threw an apple, and again Atalanta picked it up. Thus it happened even at the third time, when they had almost reached the goal. Prompted by Venus, Atalanta could not help stopping just one second to secure the beautiful apple—and so Hippomenes won race and bride. And all by help of the golden apples out of the garden in Cyprus."

"But misfortune did overtake Atalanta just as the oracle had said," added Bennie.

"Yes," assented father. "The lovers were so happy together that they forgot to render honor and thanks to Venus, who, growing indignant at their neglect, caused Cybele to change them into a lion and

lioness. Cybele having done this, yoked them to her chariot, as you can see in any Greek mythology or other picture book of the old gods."

"Wasn't Pomona the goddess of apples?" asked Bennie.

"She was the goddess of fruits," answered father, "and apple trees were among her choicest possessions, but she had also peaches and pears and grapes and other fruits in her orchards."

XX

A NORTHERN APPLE STORY

"NEARLY all the stories we have had this winter belong to the Greek and Roman gods," said Robert to his father one evening.

"Yes," was the reply, "and apples belong very specially to the cold north lands."

"Oh, yes," added Robert, "and the Northmen had their apple stories, too, as pretty as any. Tell us the story of Idun, Father."

"Oh, please do, Father!" begged Christobel and Bennie in a breath. So father went on with the story of Idun, who, as you of course know, was the beautiful Norse goddess of immortal youth. She was the daughter of the dwarf blacksmith Ivald, who lived in the bowels of the earth. But Idun was allowed to visit the earth

from time to time, and wherever she passed leaves sprouted from the bare tree twigs, and grass and flowers sprang up under her feet.

"Idun was the personification of spring, you remember," began father.

"And she was married to the beautiful god of poetry and song," added Bennie.

"Yes, the god Bragi had a magical golden harp," went on Robert, "and the music that came from it was so lovely that at the sound the trees began to bud and blossom, and flowers started up everywhere in the grass."

"They lived with the rest of the gods at their home in Asgard, I remember that much," said Christobel.

"The Northern gods lived in Asgard, but the Greek gods lived — where?" asked father.

"On Mount Olympus," promptly answered Robert.

"Well," continued father, "the gods and goddesses loved Idun for her beauty and gentleness, and also because of the mag-

ical apples which she kept in a casket and which had the power of conferring youth and beauty upon whomever ate of them."

"Even the gods had to eat Idun's apples to keep young," put in Christobel.

"Yes, and no matter how many she took out of her casket, just as many still remained in it. I should like to know what became of that casket," said Robert, lifting little Sue up to his knee where she snuggled her golden head against his breast and listened to the story.

"Everybody wanted the apples, and no wonder," added Bennie. "Now, go on, Father, and we will keep still."

"Well," said father, "one day Idun with her precious casket was stolen and carried off by a great eagle."

"It was Thiassi, the storm giant, who came in the shape of an eagle," said Robert.

"Yes," added father, "and do you remember how it happened?"

"It was all the fault of that wicked, mischievous Loki, who was always getting somebody in trouble," said Bennie.

"Yes," assented father, "Loki and two of the gods were tired and hungry one day after having wandered about a long time on the earth. So they killed an ox and tried to cook it. But although the fire burned brightly the meat would not cook. They finally discovered that it was the fault of a great eagle who sat on a tree watching them. Yes, he had used magic to keep the meat from cooking; that he admitted; but if they would give him all he could eat he would remove the spell. So they promised, and soon the meat was beautifully roasted. Then the eagle demanded so much of it for his share that Loki in a rage began to beat him with a stick."

"Loki forgot that he was up against a past master in magic," laughed Robert.

"But he was soon reminded," added father, "for the stick stuck fast to the eagle and Loki could not for the life of him let go of his end of it."

"So off flew the eagle, stick, Loki, and all," put in Bennie.

"Yes," said father, "off they went, and

Loki could not get free until he had made a solemn promise to bring Idun with her magic apples to where Thiassi, the great storm giant, could get possession of her and her fruit. Once free, Loki hastened back to Asgard and set about planning what he could do to keep his promise. At last, one day when the minstrel Bragi was away from home, Loki lured Idun outside of Asgard by telling her to come and see some apples he had found growing on a tree not far away, and that were just like her magic apples."

"What a goose Idun was!" exclaimed Christobel indignantly.

"It is a good thing she was," said Robert slyly, "or there wouldn't have been any story! Go on, Father."

"No sooner was Idun outside than Loki went off and left her, and Thiassi, the great storm giant, in the form of an eagle, swooped down and carried her off to his icy home in the northern mountains, where the winds moaned and the wolves howled. Idun, as you can imagine, was very un-

happy. She pined for home and friends and became cold and pale."

"Thiassi's home was in the Land of Winter," said Robert, "and he kept Idun until it was time for spring to come again."

"But she wouldn't give Thiassi the least little taste of her apples," said Christobel, "and I am glad of it. The cruel old giant wanted to become young and beautiful, but she wouldn't give him so much as a taste."

"Yes, winter wanted to change into spring," chimed in Robert, "and I don't blame him."

"At last the gods made Loki go and fetch Idun and her apples back," said Bennie.

"That was a trip the old rascal didn't care for," chuckled Robert, "but it wasn't so hard after all, because he borrowed the goddess Freya's falcon plumes to help him."

"No sooner had he put them on than he turned into a strong-winged falcon," added Bennie.

"He snatched Idun up in his talons and

changed her into a nut," went on father, "and so flew home to Asgard with her."

"The gods were glad to get her back and have some of her apples for dessert," said Christobel, "for they were getting to look quite old and wrinkled."

"I can tell you something about that story," said Robert; "it is a nature myth. Idun represents spring. She is carried away into the cold winter and stays until the earth looks quite old and spent. Then she comes back and the flowers bloom and youth returns to the earth. The nut is a seed and represents fruitfulness."

"It is a pretty story, anyway," said Bennie.

"The apple," added father, "was an emblem of fruitfulness with Northern peoples."

"I know where the magic apples grew," said Christobel. "They grew on the tree of life; the Norns watched over them and allowed no one but Idun ever to pick them."

XXI

OTHER APPLES

"THERE are a great many kinds of apples," said Robert gaily, "magic apples and gold apples and apples of Sodom—"

"That look so beautiful on the tree," interrupted Bennie, "but turn to dust and ashes when you eat them."

"And there is the apple of your eye," put in Robert mischievously. "Father, how did the eyeball come to be called the apple of the eye?"

"Doubtless because of its shape," replied father; "and, because it is something we value very highly, people finally spoke of a very precious possession as the apple of the owner's eye. A greatly loved son is sometimes spoken of as the apple of his father's eye."

At this Robert winked at Christobel, and tapped his own chest, and she laughed and

whispered, "You conceited old goose," then said aloud, "And there are the apples of the garden of Eden. They grew on the tree of knowledge from which Eve ate and gave some of the apples to Adam, in punishment for which they were both turned out to wander over the earth."

"The Bible doesn't say they were apples," said father.

"But the 'fruit' must have been because it was so tempting," cried Christobel.

"And there are May apples which are not apples at all," added Bennie, "and people used to call tomatoes love apples, and grow them in their flower gardens as curiosities."

"Yes, and there are winter apples," said Robert, jumping up and dancing about the room. "Let's have some. We have talked enough about false apples, and my teeth are just aching to get into a real one," and he clattered down cellar with a pan to see what he could find.

XXII

SPRING COMES AGAIN

YOU may be sure that when spring began to trail her fresh green robes over the earth, Christobel was on hand to watch the apple tree.

"I should like," she thought one warm day as she reclined in her old seat in the crotch, "I should like to see just how the apple blossoms are made."

"Shut up your eyes tight, then," said a familiar voice, and as Christobel did so there sat the little old woman looking very little and old and tired because she had just spent such a long winter doing next to nothing. Even her cheeks looked a little withered and were pale pink instead of bright red.

"You look tired and not very well," said Christobel; "I am afraid it will tire you to talk to me."

"Goodness, child!" and the little old woman began to laugh, "something to do is just what I need. It tires you out much faster to do too little, I can tell you, than to do too much. Even people who do too little grow old inside and out. Now I never grow old inside, for I can always look ahead and see plenty of lovely work coming, but I can't help getting old and shrivelled outside. However, that is neither here nor there. Spring has come with her gold and diamonds, and I am beginning to feel better already, for you know I work all summer with gold and diamonds — such pretty work!" and the little old woman really began to grow young and pretty again, right under Christobel's eyes.

"I suppose your gold is what we call sunshine, and your diamonds are raindrops and dewdrops," ventured Christobel.

"I suppose so, too," merrily answered the Sprite; "but, let me tell you, this gold and these diamonds are a million times better than hard gold and diamonds to those who know how to use them. In short, you

might have all the gold and diamonds that are buried away in all the caverns of the earth, and you would soon perish and die were it not for my kind of gold and diamonds. But now watch!" and the fairy took a sunbeam and a dewdrop in her tiny fingers and twined them together with a little sap from the tree and made exquisite little cells out of which she built up the petals of an apple blossom. How her fingers flew! all of them at once, and the thumbs, too, for at the same time that she was making the petals she had also to weave together the pistil with its little ovules, and the stamens with their anthers full of pollen dust.

"See," she said, "now you must look through a fairy microscope; or no, I will change your eyes so you can see; that will be better," and she touched Christobel's eyes and they began to see quite clearly the smallest things, just as if each apple blossom cell had been an inch long.

"My, how lovely!" cried Christobel.

"Lovely!" echoed the fairy, and began

to laugh so merrily and so prettily and so heartily that Christobel began to laugh, too. But even while laughing the fairy was not idle, but kept all her fingers flashing as quick as lightning among the apple blossom cells that she kept dividing and enlarging and dividing and enlarging and always filling full of fresh new sap so as to have it handy to weave in with the sunbeams and raindrops.

"Wouldn't it be easier to make the cells the right size at first, instead of unmaking them and making them over again all the time?" asked Christobel.

"You don't understand," said the fairy; "the apple blossoms are growing; that is the way it has to be. I cannot get enough sap to do it all at once, even if I could do it that way. Besides, whatever is worth doing at all is worth doing well, and if I could make an apple blossom in a minute I dare say it would be a flimsy affair not worth looking at; then nobody would really value it. Besides, from such a flower, how could one possibly build up a good apple

with a tough core and perfect seeds? No, slow and sure's the rule for me," and the dainty Sprite continued to twinkle in among the tiny cells with her wonderful weaving. And Christobel, looking, saw her fashion the tiny core with the tiny ovules in it, all of which was not so tiny to her, you understand, because of the new kind of eyesight the fairy had bestowed upon her.

XXIII

WHAT IS A FLOWER?

"I SEE," said Christobel, after watching intently for a few minutes as the soft little core grew and began to harden under the fairy's touch, and the tiny ovules took shape within it; "I see now just how it it is: The ripe apple is really the seed pod; it is the grown up and finished cradle; but now it is just part of the flower."

"What is a flower, anyway?" asked the fairy, with a merry twinkle in her bright little eyes.

"Oh," said Christobel, promptly, "it is something pretty to look at, and sweet to smell of, that folds about the little seed cradle."

The fairy laughed gaily and kept on working. "What am I making?" she asked at last.

"You are making five little knobs on top of the seed pod," said Christobel, promptly, then added, "I believe they are the sticky stigmas, only they are not sticky yet; but they will be sticky, won't they?"

"Of course," laughed the Sprite; "when the time comes they will be sticky enough. Otherwise how could the pollen grains stick to them?"

"And you are making stamens, too!" exclaimed Christobel. "I know they are stamens. I see the little stems with the anther boxes on top, and oh, such crowds of tiny pollen grains inside the anther boxes! I wonder why you make so many stamens."

"I don't know why," said the Sprite; "that is the secret of the apple blossom — five petals it wants and five calyx lobes and five cradle cells and five stigmas, but there the demand for five stops short, and there must be a great number of stamens. That is the way with apple blossoms. And now, My Dear, I will tell you what a flower is, and don't you forget it. A flower is the

lovely cradle of life. It is the young ovules in the pod and the magic pollen that helps to make the seeds. It is these precious things, ovules and pollen, all safely tucked away, and wrapped up in the tender, fragrant petals until the time for unfolding comes. That is a flower, My Dear."

As the fairy worked away, Christobel noticed that the petals were very small and wrapped closely about each other and all enclosed in the hard green calyx lobes. As they became larger under her magic fingers they were still kept carefully wrapped together until they were full grown and peeped out from the calyx lobes all sweetly flushed with pink.

"You have made buds!" exclaimed Christobel at last.

"Yes, they are flower buds," assented the fairy. "You see, the ovules and the pollen are not quite ready, and I must keep them all nicely covered up. When pollen and ovules are ripe and ready—Oh, you will see something then!—but maybe you are tired; maybe you have seen enough?"

"Oh, dear!" cried Christobel. "No, no, go on!"

"Very well," said the fairy; "it is fortunate you feel as you do, for you are now about to see the loveliest thing in all the world, at least so I think. Did you ever see a bud unfold into a flower?"

"I never did," said Christobel.

"Well, now look," and the fairy breathed upon a pink bud, in a cluster of other buds. Softly she breathed, then very slowly the bud began to move; it swelled a little and a little more, and then the tops of the petals opened and showed the yellow stamens and the pearly chalice in which they lay. The young flower trembled a little, then the anther cells opened. A cloud of finest dust was caught up by the breeze, a cloud of finest dust that danced in the sunbeams playing about the flower. The air was suddenly filled with fragrance, golden light flooded the earth, and Christobel thought she heard music trembling in the air.

She looked at the flower with breathless delight while the fairy watched her with

shining eyes. "You have seen a wonderful thing," she said; "you have seen a flower open. Remember how sweet it is, Oh child! You, too, will blossom like a flower one day. Keep sweet and pure, Oh human flower of the blessed earth, keep out the canker worms, keep the ugly, slimy snails away, shut out the loathesome worms and bugs, shut out all evil thoughts and base desires, keep your heart as lovely as the heart of this perfect flower!" Then suddenly changing her tone she said:

"How my bright pollen dances in the sunshine! there is enough of it, and it is good, for it is truly made."

XXIV

THE COMING OF THE BEES

"NOW that pollen must fly to the sticky stigma and stay there," said Christobel.

"Yes, some grains must fall upon the ready stigma. Do you know what happens then?" "Tell me!" begged Christobel.

"It is the most wonderful part of the story," said the Sprite. "The living part of the pollen grain finds its way down to the sleeping ovule. They unite together, and then begin to grow into the perfect apple seed."

"The ovule couldn't grow into a seed without the pollen," said Christobel.

"No, and the pollen could not grow without the ovule. They depend upon each other. But when they unite—Oh, then the apple begins to grow! The seed forms and the apple grows."

"Wouldn't the apple go on and grow anyway?"

"No, indeed; unless the seeds develop the apple cannot grow. If the pollen grains cannot reach the ovules in the flower, then all must perish. And, do the best I can, it sometimes happens that pollen grain and ovule do not meet. Sometimes there comes a heavy rainstorm just when I have opened all the apple blossoms, and the rain washes away the pollen so that it is quite lost, and then there are no apples, even if it happens to be apple year."

"How trying!" exclaimed Christobel.

"You may well say so," went on the fairy. "Yes, trying it certainly is. But if wind comes without rain, that is the best thing that could happen, for the dry pollen is then blown about and covers the sticky stigmas, and that is what is needed."

"But what about the bees?" asked Christobel. "I thought they carried the pollen?"

"They do their best," said the fairy, "but I tell you, a hard rain spoils it. Pollen

is good only a little while, you know."

"No, I didn't know it," said Christobel.

"Well, it's the truth," replied the fairy. "And sometimes there is a cold, still time, when the insects stay at home, and the wind does not help. If this lasts long enough when the apple blossoms are ready, why, they do not get the pollen in time, and again — no apples."

"Can you not put the pollen on yourself?"

The fairy shook her head a little sadly as she answered, "No, I can only make things. I can do nothing with them after they are once made. I can make the ovules and the pollen, but I cannot move the pollen — that right belongs elsewhere."

"You are not a perfect fairy, then," said Christobel, not meaning to be unkind, but only so interested to know.

"No," said the fairy, brightening up; "I am not, but you see no one is perfect. No one can do everything without help. It would be a very stupid world if everybody could do everything. You see, life is just

like this apple blossom — every part of it has to be woven together. But it takes a great many weavers, all working in and out with each other, and that is why it is so beautiful. The sun has to weave the golden heat rays; the sea has to supply the clouds with rain, and moisture for the air, and dew for the thirsty earth; the wind and the insects have to carry the pollen; your father has to protect the roots and leaves from destructive insects. Yes, indeed, many must work together to complete anything in the world."

"Yes," said Christobel, "father has to gather the apples, the hired man has to press out the cider, the cook has to peel the apples, mother has to make the pies and apple sauce — oh, dear me, it is all a golden network, just like that beautiful network your fingers are making the apple blossom out of."

"Yes," said the fairy, "life is a golden network woven by many weavers. No one can do everything alone by himself. That is why it is so beautiful."



XXV

SUMMER EVENINGS

THE Sprite told Christobel a great many lovely stories that springtime, and Christobel told them over again when the family were sitting together on the porch after supper.

"It pays to go to sleep in the apple tree," said Robert, slyly, but as it always offended Christobel to have this said, he did not say it very often, because when she was offended she would not tell any more stories that night.

"It doesn't matter anyway," said mother to comfort her; "fairies are just as able to come when we are asleep as at any other time."

"I believe they are more apt to," said father, with a twinkle in his eye.

"It is strange that pollen dust can decide what kind of apple is to grow," said Bennie, the peacemaker. "The pollen grains are so very small."

"Oh!" exclaimed Christobel, forgetting to be offended, "size doesn't count. The Apple-Tree Sprite says size doesn't count at all. A pollen grain is all marked and carved in the loveliest manner, although it is so little you can scarcely see it without a microscope. But if you were the size of a pollen grain, it would seem very large, and you could see, oh, so much in it that you can't see at all now. The markings that we see with the microscope would then look quite coarse, and no doubt there would be finer lines and spots that we can't begin to see now."

"It seems to me I have heard father say something very much like that," began Robert teasingly, but father interrupted by saying to Bennie, "You were not quite right, my boy, when you said the pollen decided what kind of apple it was to be."

"Pippin pollen makes pippin apples," said Bennie, triumphantly, then he laughed. "I was almost forgetting about the ovule; that of course has a word to say, too."

"I should think so!" exclaimed Christobel.

"If the ovule of a pippin receives pippin pollen, then, ho for pippin apples!" sang out Robert.

"But if the ovule of a pippin apple receives winesap pollen, then what?" Bennie put in.

"That," said father, laughing, "would depend upon whether the pollen or the ovule succeeded in impressing itself most strongly upon the growing seed, and upon whether the pippin flower did not reject the winesap pollen entirely in order to receive pippin pollen. It is not often one finds any but pippin apples on a pippin tree, no matter how industriously the bees may bring pollen from other varieties of apple trees."

"Plants inherit from the pollen just as much as from the seeds—didn't the fairy

tell you that?" asked Robert, tossing a clover blossom at Christobel.

"No, Mister Robert!" exclaimed Christobel, triumphantly; "The fairy didn't tell me any such nonsense as that. She told me that the plant inherits from the pollen just the same as from the ovule!"

"Bravo, Christobel!" cried father, laughing and clapping his hands. "You caught him that time."

"I don't quite understand," said Bennie.

"Can you explain it?" asked father, turning to Christobel.

"Why, yes, I think so. The ovule isn't exactly a seed. It is the little soft beginning of a seed. It cannot develop into a seed until a pollen grain unites with it. But when the pollen grain joins the ovule, then it begins to grow into a seed—isn't that right?"

"Yes, that is quite right. And when the seed is once formed, the fate of the ovule is sealed. The pollen cannot again affect it. It is only the ovule that can be fertilized by the pollen. You remember,"

added father, turning to Christobel, "that the union of a pollen grain with an ovule is called 'fertilization.'"

"The pollen fertilizes the ovule, and the ovule is fertilized by the pollen," said Bennie.

"Just so," agreed father.

XXVI

THE IDEA OF THE TREE

"THE fairy showed me just how the ovule is fertilized," said Christobel, casting a defiant look at Robert. "It seemed just as if there was a little tree made out of mist in each little ovule. The fairy called it the idea of a tree."

"Father said—" began Robert, but father's hand suddenly put over his mouth smothered the rest of the speech, whatever it was. "Go on, Christobel," said father, and she continued.

"The little mist tree was exactly like the mother tree, the same bark, the same leaves, the same apples, with the same color and flavor and shape. Only this little mist tree could not grow at all until a pollen grain came and joined it, and each little pollen grain had a little mist tree in it, and the mist tree was just like the tree the pol-

len came from, it remembered everything. But the pollen tree couldn't grow either, not until it flew to the sticky stigma and found its way down to the little ovule. When this happened and the pollen grain and the ovule became one — why, then a little plant began to grow, and it grew and grew until it became a seed. Then it rested awhile until it was ripe. Then it fell on the ground and went on growing and growing and growing until it became an apple tree."

"Phew! what a long speech!" exclaimed Robert, with a roguish laugh.

"There is more to it, you old tease," went on Christobel. "The new apple tree that grew from the seed was just like the tree the ovule and the pollen came from. They both grew in the blossoms of a pippin apple, and so the new tree was a pippin."

"Pippin flowers take pippin pollen best," said Bennie, laying his arm across Robert's shoulder.

"But you could keep the pippin pollen away by covering the flower," said Christo-

bel, "and yourself putting on pollen from a red apple. Then the spirit in the ovule of the pippin apple might share with the spirit in the pollen of the red apple, and we might get a fine new apple."

"Yes, but the fairy didn't need to tell you that," said Robert, making a funny face at Christobel. "Father has said it, besides it is all printed out in your botany book."

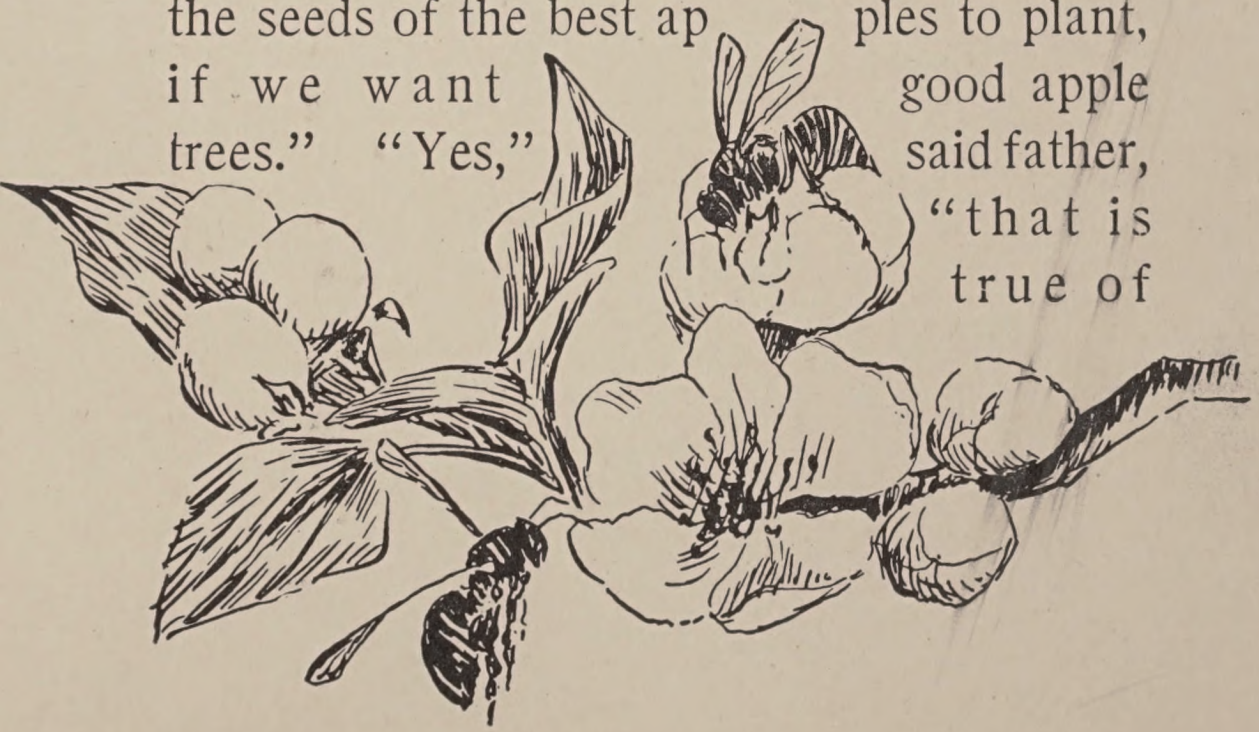
"But the fairy showed me," insisted Christobel. "I saw with my eyes just how it was done. When stranger pollen came to the little ovule in the flower, then the apple began to grow, and sometimes the stranger pollen gave up its rights and the apple was just like the other apples on the tree. But sometimes the stranger pollen got the little ovule to give up all its rights and grow into an apple tree just like the tree the pollen came from. And sometimes both shared together and the apple was partly like the other apples on the tree, and partly like the apples on the tree the pollen came from. The fairy showed me a

streaked apple that she said had come from the union of pollen from a red apple with the ovule of a yellow one."

"It is what we call inheritance," said father. "Apples inherit their shape and color and size and flavor from the ovules in the blossoms of the tree they grow on. But they also inherit through the pollen, so if you fertilize the ovule of one kind of tree with the pollen of another you may get a new apple, or you may not—all depends upon which inheritance is stronger."

"The ovule is the mother part of the plant," said Christobel.

"Inheritance can be good or bad," said Bennie, "and we ought always to pick out the seeds of the best apples to plant, if we want good apple trees." "Yes," said father, "that is true of



everything. To have good offspring we must have good parents."

"It is true of animals, too," said Robert.

"Yes, and even of people," added father. "A good inheritance of health and intelligence is the richest gift that parents can bestow upon their children. It is far better than lands and money."

"A little of those thrown in, for me!" said Robert, mischievously.

"You shall have all the land you will take care of," said father, heartily.



XXVII

CHRISTOBEL'S DECISION

"I," SAID Christobel, "am going to plant apple trees in my land when I get some."

"You ought to begin then to learn to care for them," said father; "and right away you might go and pull off the sprouts that have started out below the graft on that young tree I showed you this morning, and that long sucker that has shot up from the roots."

"What harm do they do?" asked Christobel. "I should think they would grow and make the tree bigger."

"Not the sucker," said Bennie. "If you let suckers grow you get a lot of bushy twigs that do not bear apples, but do take the sap-food from the rest of the tree."

"And the sprouts," added father, "that grow out below the graft will grow into big limbs and bear apples, but the apples will be nothing but wild apples like those the tree bore before it was grafted. The good apples grow only on the grafted limbs."

"The fairy hasn't explained grafts," said Christobel. "I do not understand very much about them."

"Why," said Robert, "let me be the fairy and I will make it all as plain as day, now see if I don't. You take a good healthy young tree that bears poor fruit and cut off all its limbs rather close to the main trunk. And into the cut ends, just under the bark, you plant a live twig with leaf buds on it from some apple tree that bears splendid apples. You cover the cut place with wax to keep the sap from running out. The transplanted twig grows just as if it were

on its own tree, and it bears the same kind of apples as the tree it came from."

"Very well told," said father.

"That seems strange to me," said Bennie. "I should think it would bear wild apples like the tree it was grafted to. It gets sap out of the roots of that tree."

"Very true," said father, "but sap, you know, is only food. When a rabbit eats turnips, it changes them in its body into rabbit tissues. But when a boy eats turnips, they become boy. It all depends, you see, upon who does the work of transforming the food. Your graft knows how to make a certain kind of apple, and that it makes, no matter who supplies the food."

"It is a good thing it always remembers," said Robert.

"I should think so," agreed father. "We should have poor orchards indeed if we could not graft the trees, for it is only once in a while that we get good fruit from a seedling tree; but if we succeed in getting just one good tree — why, then, we can have thousands just like it in a few years

by grafting its buds into trees that bear common apples."

"Do the grafts always bear just the same apples as they did before they were put into the new tree?" asked Robert. "It seems to me I have heard something different about that."

"Perhaps not always," answered father, "but often enough to make grafting, or budding, the best and surest way to get the apple you want."

"Budding is about the same as grafting, isn't it?" asked Bennie.

"Yes, only you plant one leaf bud into the tree limb instead of a whole twig."

"Why not plant good apple seeds to start with?" asked Bennie. "I should think that would be easier than grafting after the trees are partly grown."

"The trouble is," said father, "it is very hard to get apple trees to bear apples like those from which the seeds are taken; if you plant pippin seeds, for instance, the trees that come from them may bear sour wild apples."

"Oh, ho!" said Robert, pulling Christobel's pigtail; "what has become of inheritance now?"

"Well," said father, "it is just because of inheritance that this is so. Inheritance is very deep seated, and it takes a good many generations sometimes to change a habit and to 'fix,' as we say, a new habit. Your seed inherits, that is true; but it is more apt to transmit an old inheritance than a new one. You might get one tree that inherited the idea of a good apple out of a great many seeds that you planted. Then, if you took seeds from the apples of that good tree and planted them, you might get a number of good trees, as well as many poor ones. And so, if you kept on for a good many generations planting the seeds from those trees that inherited the idea of good fruit, in course of time all the seeds, or nearly all, would have the good-apple habit fixed, so they would grow into the kind of tree you wanted."

"But why don't we?" asked Robert.

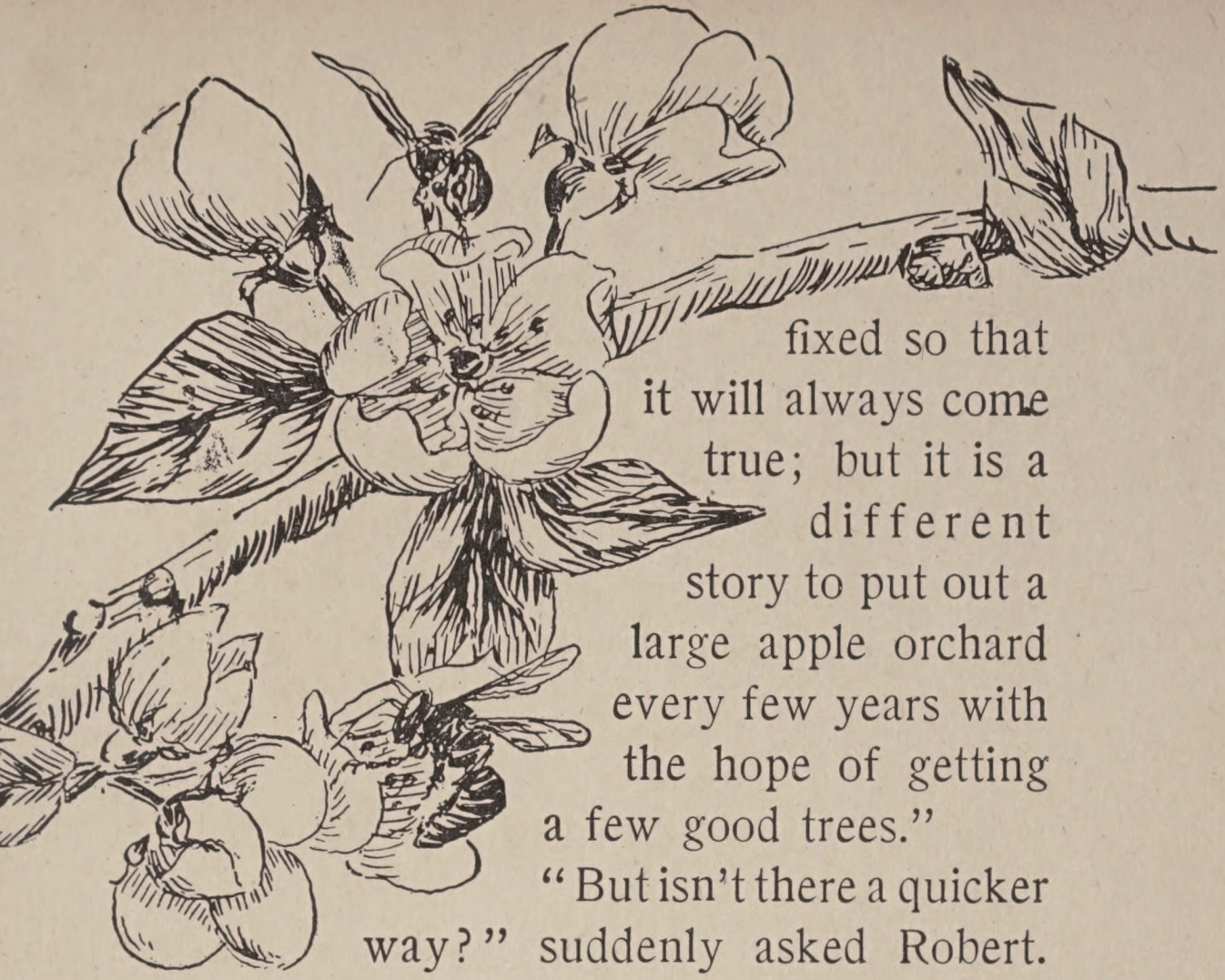
"I guess it would take too long," said Bennie.

"Just the point," assented father. "If you planted your apple seeds today from the best pippin tree, it would be several years before the young trees bore fruit, and then suppose none of them bore the kind of fruit you wanted, or suppose one or two did, then all the rest of the trees would have to be dug up, and all the time and care you had lavished on them would be wasted. And so it would go, and you would be old before you got a tree whose seeds always grew into good apple trees, if you succeeded in getting one at all. No, it is easier, and better, to take a good, strong young tree and graft it—then you can have a whole orchard of good trees in a few years."

"That is the way I am going to start," said Robert.

"But with quick-growing plants it is different," said Bennie.

"Yes, indeed," replied father; "you can afford to plant an acre of peas every year until you get the kind of pea you want



fixed so that it will always come true; but it is a different story to put out a large apple orchard every few years with the hope of getting a few good trees."

"But isn't there a quicker way?" suddenly asked Robert. "It seems to me I have read something about planting a whole young tree, instead of a graft, in another tree."

"You should have read it more carefully," said father. "But it is true that experiments are being made that shorten up the time a great deal. You can plant a seedling tree in another tree and get fruit from it in a year or two; but even that is slow compared to planting a gardenful of peas. But you can try it."

"I am going to," said Robert, decidedly, "just for the fun of it."

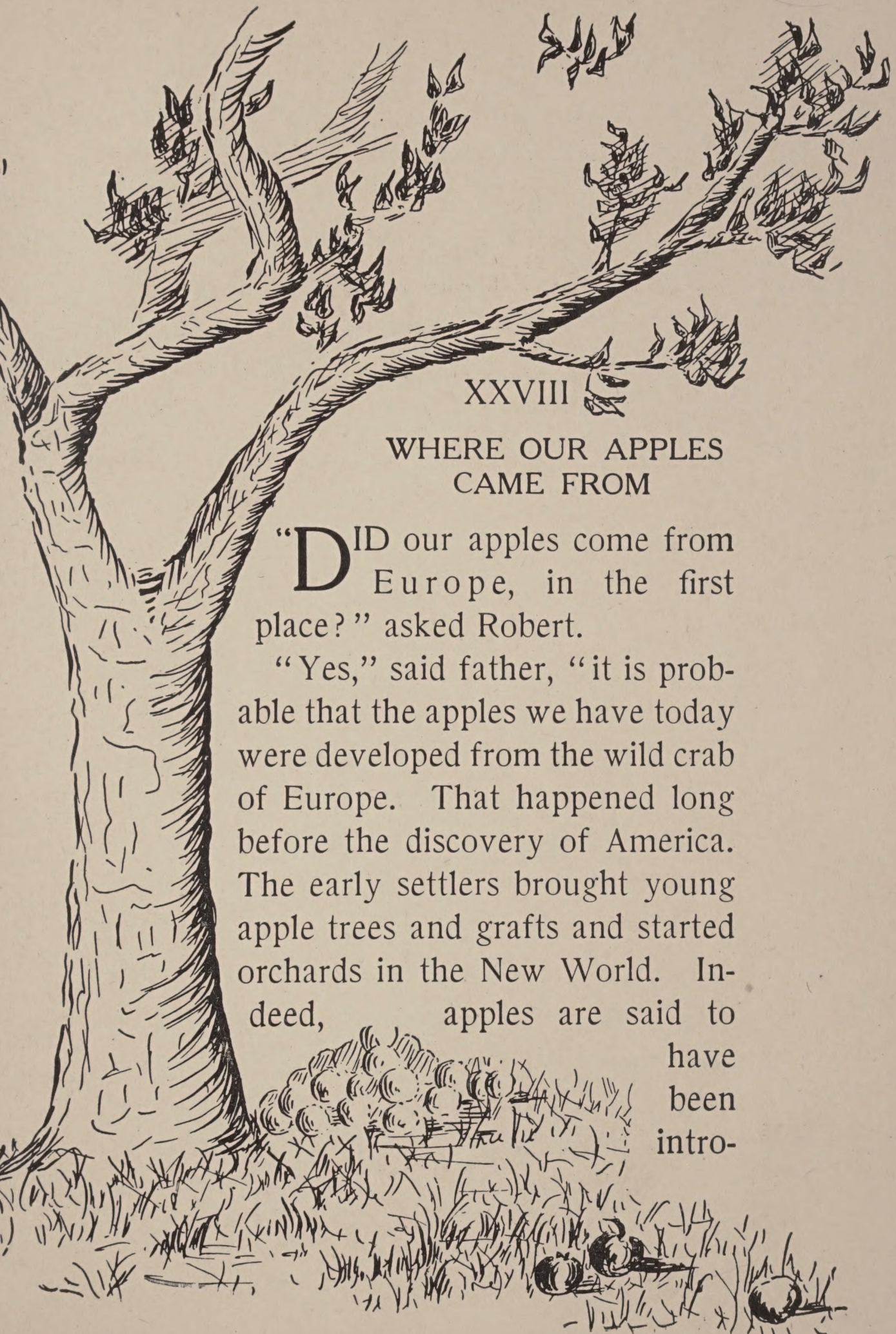
"So am I," added Bennie. "And when I get a fine new apple, then I shall take buds from it and put them in all the trees I have that bear poor fruit."

"What will you call your fine new apple?" asked Christobel.

"He will call it the Robertus," said Robert, loftily.

"Not a bit of it," protested Christobel; "he will call it after somebody else, won't you, Bennie?"

"Perhaps," said Bennie, laughing, "I will call it the Christorobertus."



XXVIII

WHERE OUR APPLES CAME FROM

"DID our apples come from Europe, in the first place?" asked Robert.

"Yes," said father, "it is probable that the apples we have today were developed from the wild crab of Europe. That happened long before the discovery of America. The early settlers brought young apple trees and grafts and started orchards in the New World. Indeed, apples are said to have been intro-

duced into America from England in 1629, by the Governor of Massachusetts Bay. But since then a good many new apples have been developed in America from that first old English stock. Some of the best apples in the world are now grown here. The apple tree liked the northern part of America quite as much as the people liked it, and in time there arose fine new apples. One of these, the Newtown Pippin, is one of the very finest apples in the whole world."

"The Baldwin is an American apple, isn't it, father?" asked Bennie.

"Yes, and so is the Spitzenberg, and a number of other fine apples."

"But we have wild apples, haven't we?" asked Christobel; "those over on the edge of the pasture that make such good cider."

Father shook his head. "No, little daughter, those are not natives. They have come from the seeds of cultivated apples that were dropped there, and that sprouted and grew into trees without cultivating or grafting. But there are wild crab apples in America which it might be possible to de-

velop into fine apples, only nobody has taken the time and trouble to do it."

"I saw wild crabs when I went West with Uncle John last year," said Robert. "The trees were covered with deep pink blossoms, oh, so fragant! Why, they were as sweet-scented as English violets."

"Yes," said Christobel, "you sent a box-ful home to mother, and they dried up and smelled sweet all winter."

"Some people believe that the blood of the wild crab is in some of our good, spicy American apples," said father. "It may have happened that the pollen of the crab fertilized the ovule of some orchard tree. Then from the seed of that apple may have grown a tree that bore a new, spicy apple."

"There are a great many kinds of apples," said Bennie.

"Yes," agreed father, "and they are changing all the time. Every few years you hear of some fine, new apple. And gradually the old apples seem to disappear, and give way to the new. I have noticed that in my lifetime."

"I am glad apples have got into stories," said Christobel.

"Yes," added father, "there are a good many apple stories in different parts of the world. The apple has always been a favorite. It was a symbol of fertility in ancient Britain, and the apple tree was reverenced by the old Druids because the sacred mistletoe so often grew on its boughs. I have read that even to this day the people in some parts of England salute the apple trees to encourage them to bear a full crop."

"How do they do it?" asked Bennie.

"It is an ancient custom," answered father. "The farmers use fitting incantations, and pour the contents of a wassail bowl about the roots, then farmers and men dance around the tree in a circle, singing a toast to the tree like the following:

Here's to thee, old apple tree,
Whence thou mayst bud and whence thou
mayst blow;
And whence thou mayst bear apples enow,
Hats full! caps full!
Bushels and sacksful!
Huzza!

"How jolly!" cried Robert.

"What is a wassail bowl?" asked Christobel.

"It is the bowl out of which people in olden times drank toasts to each other," answered Robert.

"I thought people ate toast, not drank it," said Christobel; at which Robert began to laugh, but father stopped him, saying, "Not so fast, my son, perhaps you really know as little about these toasts as Christobel. Do you know why they are called toasts?"

"No, I don't," laughed Robert, pulling Christobel's apron string and looking a little ashamed.

"Shall I laugh at you?" asked father.

"No, father," said Robert, roguishly, "don't laugh, but take pity on a poor ignoramus, and enlighten his ignorance."

At this father and all the rest of them had a good laugh, and then father began to tell about the wassail bowl. "We know something about it from the name," he said. 'Wassail' is a very old word mean-

ing 'be whole,' 'be well.' People used to use it as a salutation, as we today say 'farewell.' The ancient Britons used this salutation when they offered the drinking cup to a guest. Just as the people of today sometimes say 'Here's to your health,' when drinking together. From this, wassailing came finally to mean drinking a health. And the drink in those ancient times was not wine, because grapes did not grow abundantly in Britain."

"Perhaps they drank cider," said Christobel.

"Yes, they drank cider sometimes, and sometimes ale sweetened and spiced and flavored with fruits. And on Christmas eve they drank to the health of the apple trees."

"Oh, how pretty!" cried Christobel.

"But the toast," reminded Robert.

"I am coming to that," said father. "It was the custom in those old times to put a piece of toasted bread in the bottom of the wassail bowl, no doubt to give flavor to the drink, and somehow the name of the

toast replaced that of the wassail in drinking a health; so, instead of drinking a wassail to a friend, they drank a toast, as we do today."

"How odd," said Robert. "I wonder how it came about."

"Nobody knows," said father, "though there are various explanations. But we do know that it was customary to pass the wassail bowl about at Yuletide, which you know is Christmas time, and on Christmas, as I said, they wassailed the apple trees."

"What jolly things apples are!" suddenly exclaimed Bennie. "When we find out about them we learn history and mythology and about different countries and languages, and get so many pretty stories."

"Yes," said father, "that is true, and it is true of everything else as well. You cannot really learn about any one thing without learning about a great many other things. Nothing stands alone."

"That is exactly what the Apple-Tree Sprite told me!" exclaimed Christobel.

"Everything is woven together with everything else. She said that if you really knew all there was to know about one thing you would have to know about everything else in the whole world. It is all a shining network."



XXIX

FUN AND FACT

"THE apple tree breathes," announced Christobel one evening.

"That's no news," said Robert. "Every living thing breathes, every plant and every animal."

"The plant breathes all over its surface," added Bennie.

"Do you know how?" asked father.

"I do," said Christobel. "It takes the oxygen out of the air wherever the air touches it."

"Then what?" asked father.

"The plant uses the oxygen and sends the carbon dioxide back into the air again, just as our lungs do," said Robert.

"It is the oxygen in the air that keeps us alive," said Christobel.

"Yes, and too much carbon dioxide would smother us to death," added Bennie.

"I should think," went on father, "that with all the plants and animals breathing carbon dioxide into the air, and using up the oxygen, we would soon smother."

"Oh father!" exclaimed Christobel, don't you remember, the plants breathe the carbon dioxide out into the air and then they *eat it up*. They *breathe* air and they *eat* air. When they breathe they keep the oxygen and send out carbon dioxide. But when they eat, it is just the opposite."

"Yes," put in Robert, "a regular see-saw; breathing in oxygen, sending out carbon dioxide; eating up carbon dioxide, sending out oxygen."

"Fortunately for us, they eat up much more carbon dioxide than they breathe out," said father, "and so they keep the air pure for us to breathe."

"What should we do without the plants!" exclaimed Bennie suddenly;

"they give us air to breathe and food to eat."

"Yes, indeed," said father; "if it were not for the plants where would we be? We could not live at all. They are able to take food from air and earth and water, and build it up into food for animals."

"Animals cannot eat mineral food," said Bennie; "they have to eat plants."

"Sometimes they eat meat," said Robert.

"Yes, but what does the animal eat that the meat comes from?" demanded Bennie, triumphantly.

Father laughed. "In the end, the food of the animal must come from the plant."

"My apple tree is all the time giving me oxygen to breathe and making apples for me to eat," and Christobel clapped her hands in delight.

"Yes," said Robert, catching her up and whirling about with her, "so it is. And you are feeding your precious apple tree every time you draw breath!"

"Not much!" shouted Bennie; "it's when she lets out breath that she feeds the tree."

"You are too literal," said Robert, with a toss of the head; "I was talking poetry."

"Now talk sense, you old tease," said Christobel, pulling free from him, "and tell why you said the other day that our house and furniture and nearly everything else was just our breath frozen into wood."

Father laughed. "There, Rob, what are you going to do about that?"

Robert looked at Christobel and opened his eyes very wide at her; then he said with a laugh, "I was teasing her, yet in a sense it is true. The trees make the greater part of their wood out of carbon which they get from the air. And the air gets it from our breathing, at least it gets a good deal that way."

"He said," went on Christobel, with a defiant look at Robert, "that I ought to breathe deep so as to put wood enough into the air to build our new barn."

They all laughed, and father said, "That was good advice about breathing deep, but I fear we should never have the barn if we had to wait for the wood to grow."



XXX

AUTUMN LEAVES

"I must ask the fairy why she doesn't color the apple tree leaves bright colors in the fall, the way the maples and oaks are colored," thought Christobel to herself; and so it happened, one autumn day when the sun was as hot as summer, that Christobel climbed to her favorite seat in the apple tree, and sure enough, along came the fairy looking young and gay and happy.

"You must have had plenty of hard work this summer," said Christobel, very much pleased at her appearance.

"Indeed I have," agreed the fairy, "even though you did not have much of an apple crop. Still I finished up enough for family use, and I have been Oh, so busy, starting flower buds for next year—just wait till you see. My! such a crop as you will have; that is, if all the helpers do their part. Anyway, I have done mine, and now all depends on the bees and the wind and the rain and the frost and the bad insects and your own watchfulness."

"What has the frost to do with it, I wonder?" asked Christobel. "Snow and ice and zero weather do not hurt the apple trees. Cold is good for them."

"So it is," said the fairy; "which is why apples do not grow in hot countries. You never saw an apple tree and an orange tree side by side, did you?"

"I never did," admitted Christobel. "But then I never saw an orange tree anyway, excepting a little one in a box."

"Well, you probably never will see apples and oranges growing together, because apple trees need the cold, and orange trees can't stand it. But there are times for all things, and while cold is good for the tree after it has shed its leaves and gone to sleep for the winter, it is bad for it after the tender leaves and blossoms have started in the spring — so bad, indeed, that a late frost sometimes kills the whole crop."

"I hope that won't happen to our trees," said Christobel; "and speaking of leaves, you have never told me why you do not dress the apple trees up in the autumn the way the oaks and maples and dogwoods and beech trees are dressed — all in such pretty bright colors."

"Well, now," said the fairy, "I am sorry you noticed that. The truth is, I can only do what I can do."

"I suppose you haven't time for everything," said Christobel, sorry she had raised the question.

"Oh, it isn't that," said the fairy, with a shrug; "it goes deeper than that. It goes

down to the very root of things. You see, I can paint the apples, but I cannot paint the leaves. I can loosen them so they can fall from the trees, and sometimes I can get rather a pretty yellow effect, but generally, in spite of me, the leaves turn brown and rusty looking. If I could make an apple tree blaze like that sumac bush, how proud I should be—but then," she added merrily, "if I could do that I might grow proud and spend too much time and talent painting leaves to the neglect of the fruit, which you will admit I do succeed in making quite beautiful."

"Oh, yes," said Christobel, heartily; "beautiful it is, as beautiful as leaves, yes, a thousand times more beautiful, I think, and oh, so good to eat; I thank you so much, Dear Fairy, for doing the apples, and never mind about the leaves. I like them best, anyway, just as they are. If they were different, they wouldn't be the dear old apple leaves."

"I am glad you feel so," said the fairy, looking relieved.

XXXI

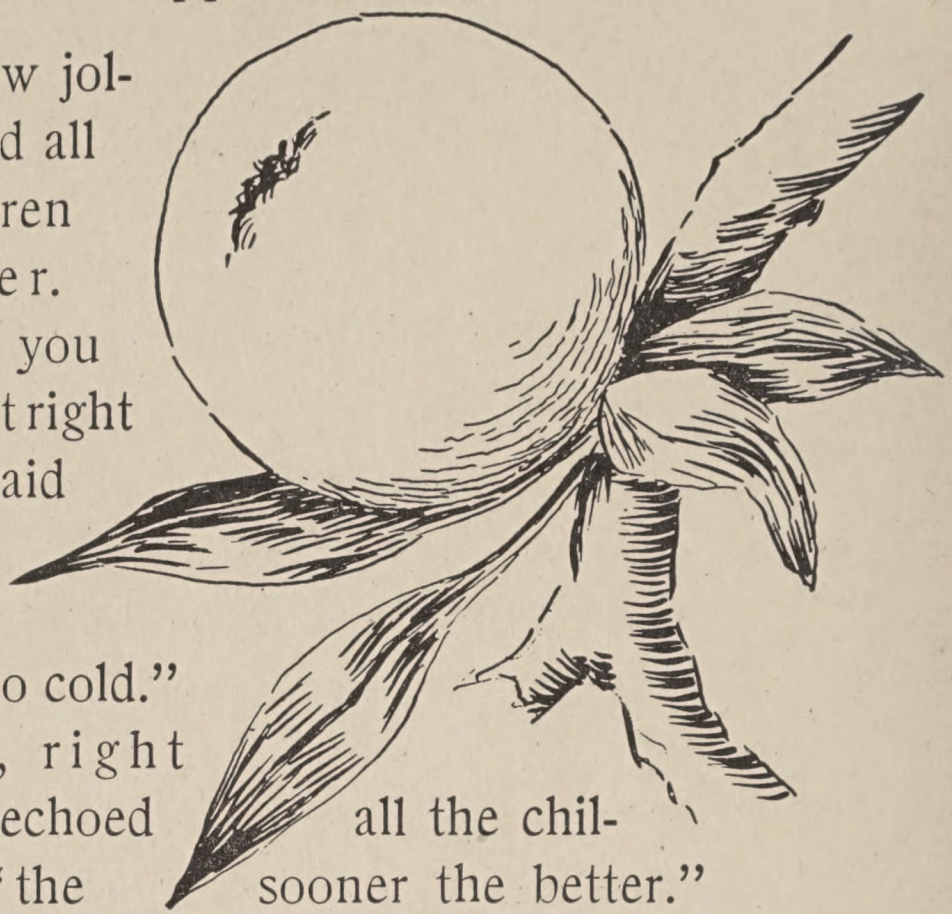
PLANNING AN APPLE THANKSGIVING PARTY

"I THINK it would be a great thing to have an apple Thanksgiving," said Christobel, one evening early in October. "The apples give us so much — stories and history and poems and good talks by the fire and fairy talks in the tree, to say nothing of apples to eat, and all sorts of good things that cook can make."

"I think that is a capital idea," said father, and mother agreed. "Let us work it out," she said, and so they all got together and worked it out. It was finally decided to give an apple party.

"If you give the party, you must do the work yourselves," said mother, "else it would not be your party."

"I," said father, "will supply the banquet hall. You may have the floor of the big barn."



"Oh, how jolly!" cried all the children together.

"And you must do it right away," said mother, "before it gets too cold."

"Yes, right away!" echoed all the children; "the sooner the better."

"I," said Bennie, "will fix up a long table in the barn. I will make it out of new boards with criss-cross legs—all very strong and clean."

So he made the table, while Robert gathered a great many spicy little wild apples, which are the best of all for cider, you know, and took them to the cider mill and got the hired man to help him work the mill, with the assistance of old gray Dobbin, and press out the juice into sparkling cider. For everything that went on the

Thanksgiving apple table they were to make themselves, you remember. Mother said that a part of the Thanksgiving was that they were able to do these things.

But while the boys were busy outside, Christobel and her cousins, Jessie and Rose, June Rose Christobel's father always called her because she was born in June, were not idle in the house. Indeed, they were just about as busy as bees, and the kitchen smelled like the quintessence of all the apples in the world. How they did work, paring apples and cooking them!

They had three pots bubbling on the stove at once. One had juice in it boiling down to make jelly—spicy, tart jelly, for they had selected the very best flavored apples of all for their jelly. And one had apple butter in it, and the other some delicate white apples that were slowly softening into the most delicious apple sauce. How the three watched those pots!

Jessie took the apple sauce off at just the right moment. Christobel put cider

and spices in the apple butter that had to cook and cook until it was quite thick and dark-colored. Rose put the sugar in the jelly and skimmed the scum carefully from the top, and kept dropping a little out of a spoon into a tumblerful of cold water to see when it was hard enough. "Now!" she cried, and took the boiling kettle off the stove and poured the contents into the row of bright, clean tumblers that stood all ready on the table.

I declare, there stood a whole dozen of tumblers of apple jelly, the finest you ever saw, as clear and sparkling as though it had been made of melted amber beads, and tasting, father said, just like ambrosia, as far as he knew anything about ambrosia. Rose was so proud that she flushed quite red, and looked like a red, red rose — or was it because of the heat of the stove? But anyway, she was as red as a ripe apple as they all praised her jelly.

"My apple butter won't be handsome, but I hope it will at least taste handsome," said Christobel, stirring away to keep it

from burning, and her cheeks were as red as apples, too; but it was probably the heat of the stove, although she, too, felt proud of the good smell that came from her apple butter, which father said made him feel just like a little boy again, when he used to have bread and apple butter for supper all winter long.

"Didn't you get tired of it?" asked Christobel.

"Never!" he replied, emphatically. "I am sure apple butter is also a variety of ambrosia."

"How about apple sauce?" demanded little Cousin Jessie, dancing about and flourishing her big stirring spoon.

"Apple sauce like that," said father, critically, "is the third variety of ambrosia—there were three kinds, you know," and amid the laughter of all the rosy-cheeked apple cooks he fled from the kitchen to attend to his own affairs.

"Who is to make the apple pie?" asked Christobel, with a little trouble in her voice, for an apple festival without apple pie was

a thing of course that could not be thought of, and none of the children were yet equal to pastry.

"Well," said mother, "I should like to have a little share in all this, and I will make the pie crust."

"Hurrah!" cried the girls, and danced about and flourished their spoons until you would have thought the Indians had got loose in the kitchen.

"I know how to make a Dutch apple cake," said Cousin Jessie.

"And I can make apple duff," said June Rose.

"I can make layer cake," said Christobel, "if Rose will give me some of her jelly to put in."

"Oh, won't I, just!" squealed Rose, delighted at the thought of jelly cake, "and I will beat the eggs for you."

"And I will make icing for it," screamed Christobel, "and we will decorate it, and have a dear little gay lady-apple on top."

"Oh, yes, we will," they all cried; "and we will get some green smilax from Cousin

Lucy's hothouse, just enough to make it look lovely." "Save your best apple seeds," said Christobel. "I have an idea that we could decorate the cake with apple seed patterns and have red and yellow and green caraway candies to make it bright."

"Hurrah! hurrah!" cried all the red-cheeked apple cooks again.

"Where are your dried-apple pies?" squeaked a teasing voice from behind the kitchen door; "how can you have an apple festival without any dried apples?"

"Oh, it's that old tormenting Robert!" cried Christobel, running and pulling him out. "You know you boys are not to come into the kitchen once — not once; mother said so!"

"But just think," squeaked Robert in the drollest fashion, "if it hadn't been for that fairy behind the door, you wouldn't have had any dried apples in your show."

"That's so," admitted June Rose, as soon as the gale of laughter that had greeted Robert's emergence from behind the door had subsided. "What can we do?"

"Oh, don't worry," Robert squeaked on in such a comical manner that the girls went off in another gale of laughter; "don't worry, babies; when there are fairies about everything happens just right. And this beautiful little fairy"—here he put his hand on his heart and made a low bow, while the girls nearly died laughing, "this beautiful little fairy, who hates dried apples, nevertheless peeled and sliced some and put them in the drier and fired up—with the help of Patrick, another fairy—and they are all ready to come before the footlights."

"You dear old Robert!" and Christobel threw her arms about him and gave him such a hug, at which he pulled loose and ran out of the door, followed by the cheers and laughter of all the red-cheeked cooks, who went right to work and stewed and cooked and fixed up everything they could think of out of the nice dried apples they found in the apple drier.

"It would have been just dreadful to have forgotten all about dried apples," they said.



XXXII

THE INVITATIONS

THE festival was fixed for day after to-morrow, and when night came and the jelly was set away and the apple sauce put in a cool place in the pantry and the apple butter put in a crock and set away, the children gathered together to talk it over — for Jessie and Rose were to stay all night and, indeed, all the time until after the festival.

"Now," said Christobel, "we must send out the invitations."

"We can't shed fragrance abroad, the way the flowers do," added Robert, "so we shall have to use written notes instead."

So they all got some paper and their best pens and set to work. The boys invited all the boys they knew, and the girls invited all the girls.

"I think," said mother, "it would be nice to invite the fathers and mothers, too. I am sure they would enjoy it as much as the children."

"I am sure I don't want to be left out," said father, "and I can't come without an invitation, and if I am invited, all the other fathers must be."

"Of course!" shouted the children. "Hurrah! Hurrah!"—and they wrote some more notes and invited all the fathers and mothers and politely asked them to bring the babies because they knew that some of them couldn't come without. What a pile of notes there was!

"Now, who is to be postman?"

"I!" cried Robert. "I am the postman!"

"Me, too!" shouted Bennie; "one isn't enough. You fly east and I'll fly west. Remember that the Slocums live a mile and a half up the road, and the Grahams two miles down the road!" So the notes were all sorted out, some to go up the road with Robert, and some to go down the road with Bennie.

When bedtime came the children all knew they should not sleep a wink; it was as exciting as Christmas. But they had no sooner laid their heads on the pillows than the sand man slipped in and closed up their eyes, and they knew nothing more until the sun began to look in and laugh at them for being such a set of lazy bones. You see, they were tired after the long day's work, and mother had not wakened them at the usual time.

Of course they had to go to school, but as soon as it was out, for it was Friday and a half holiday, they all rushed off, the boys to distribute what few notes were left, for they had delivered most of them at recess, as nearly all of the children invited were

at school that morning. And the three girls rushed home to Christobel's to make the cakes, for they had finally decided to have two, and the Dutch apple cake.

But the pies and the apple duff had to be made Saturday morning, for mother said such things must be eaten quite fresh.



XXXIII

ALL IS READY

WHEN Saturday morning came, everybody was up with the sun. The table in the barn was all ready. Christobel put a white cloth on it, and the boys brought baskets full of apples that they had gathered themselves, and you may be sure they took none but the best and prettiest! They

piled up a great pyramid of bright red apples in the middle of the table, and on either side of it a smaller pyramid of bright yellow ones, and then all down the table, little pyramids of green apples and striped ones and red-and-yellow ones. My! how good it did smell in the barn there with the apples on the table and the sweet hay in the loft.

"The fragrant airs of the Spice Islands and the Camphor Islands put together can't compare with it," father said. And how pretty it did look! But it was not finished yet, as you know.

Now comes a procession from the house. June Rose, carrying her jelly in a basket, came first. She arranged ten glass saucers on the table; you see two of her tumblers of jelly had gone for jelly cake. Carefully, oh so carefully, she turned out a glass of jelly into each saucer. Not one broke, but they all trembled a little as though they were too delighted to keep still, and they sparkled like real jewels and the glass saucers sparkled, too, in sympathy, no

doubt, as they reflected the bright color of the jelly. It made the table look prettier than ever, and everyone cried out in delight. Then came Jessie with a tray holding two big dishes—of what? It looked like white seafoam, but it was her delicious apple sauce with a luscious tower of meringue on top, made of the whites of eggs beaten up with fine white sugar.

"Um!" said the boys, who were decorating the sides of the barn with green pine boughs just like Christmas. "For it will be a sort of apple Christmas," they said.

Christobel came next with her rich reddish-brown apple butter in a big glass dish that showed its pretty color. "It would taste better if it could stand awhile," said she, "but I suppose it ought to be here."

"I should think so!" exclaimed father, who had just walked in. "What would an apple party be without apple butter? But where is your apple bread?"

"Oh, father!" cried Christobel, and began to pound him. "Oh, uncle!" cried Jessie and Rose, and began to pound him,

too, until he had to get out of the barn as fast as he could. Then the procession rushed back to the house and came again, this time bearing apple pies—all rich and sweet with the juice boiled out just enough along the edge of the crust. Goodness! They had to go twice, there were so many pies to bring, for good Aunt Delia, the black cook, had turned in and helped. And when the boys saw how they looked with the thick, sweet juice boiled out just enough along the crust, they said "Um!"

And then the procession ran to the house again and came back bearing apple tarts and apple duff and three kinds of apple pudding, one with hard sauce with cinnamon in, one with rich soft sauce, and one with a delicious sauce made of apple. When the boys saw these things and smelled how good they were, they smacked their lips and said "Um!"

Again the procession disappeared and appeared again. "This," said Jessie, "is Dutch apple cake, but as it is only biscuit dough with sliced apples stuck in on top

with sugar and raisins and spices sprinkled over, it will do very well for bread, so we have apple bread as well as apple butter, after all."

Behind Jessie and her apple bread came Christobel and June Rose, each bearing a sort of palace as big around as a peck measure, and as white as snow, and all decorated with the most fascinating designs in black apple seeds and red, yellow, and green caraway candies, and each had a little cupola on top made of lady apples stuck together with sugar. The two marble palaces, of course, were the jelly cakes, which Aunt Delia had helped them make, which is why they were so big. When the boys saw these, there was nothing for them to do but say "Um! Um! Um!"

Last of all came little Sue, carrying a basket of lady apples very carefully. But just before she got to the barn door she stubbed her toe and down she went ker-plump! and the lady apples rolled and ran and danced and fled in all directions like a company of mice that heard the cat coming.

Down she went, and away went the lady apples, and from all the children there broke forth such a merry burst of laughter that it made one think of a flock of blackbirds all gurgling at once. Then everybody ran after the runaway apples and captured them and put them back in the basket and helped little Sue to stand it safely on the table.

Father had bought the lady apples at the store, for the pretty things did not grow in their orchard.

You can imagine what the table looked like when the girls got through decorating it. And what the barn looked like when the boys got through putting up fragrant pine boughs and a few holly branches they had found in the swamp. They had taken bushes of bright red berries, too, from the swamp, and crimson sumac seed clusters, and some vines with bluish berries and some more with black ones, and draped them about most beautifully. It looked like a real festival when they got through.

And then Bennie came with the wheelbarrow full of pitchers of sweet new apple

cider, which he had stood in a box so as to keep them from upsetting. These he stood on the table, and as some were glass pitchers, the golden cider inside them blinked and sparkled to the amber jelly as much as to say, "Well, how splendidly we represent the honorable apple family, you all dressed in your best jewel glints, and I in my brightest sparkles."

"Now we must change our dresses," said the girls; "do you stay, Robbie, and look out that a mouse does not jump on the table and nibble the cake, or somebody's dog get in and eat the pie."

Robert shook his head as he said doubtfully, "Just as you say, babies, but I am not sure that I shall be any better than a mouse or a doggie if left alone here — and me as hungry as a bear with working so hard."

"Nonsense!" said June Rose, severely; "of course you won't touch a thing. Now be sure you don't," she added, for as they started to go Robert made believe snatch at a pudding that stood near him.

"We won't be long," sang out Christobel, unbuttoning her kitchen apron as she ran. Before you knew it, they were all coming back, but you would not have known the procession this time! It was like a troop of fairies, or a flight of some unknown kind of butterfly, for they came fluttering over the green grass with their white dresses, and white stockings with little brown and red and blue ankle ties, and big gay ribbon bows that really did look like butterflies, bobbing on top of their heads, with their hair all nicely combed. And on behind, flapping her wings as she ran, came the very smallest white fairy of all, with the very biggest blue ribbon bow — baby Sue, gurgling with delight, for she had not been allowed in the kitchen, and for two days had only been able to guess at what was going on by the delicious smells that came out through the cracks.

As soon as they arrived, Robert rushed off to brush his hair and put on another necktie. Bennie had already combed his hair, blacked his shoes, and come back.

XXXIV

THE PARTY

THEN the guests began to arrive. First came the Montford children with Aunt Chloe to look after them. Each one had a round apple cut out of shiny red paper sewed on to her pinafore. Then came all the Stewarts, father, mother, baby May, and the three school boys, and they each had an apple twig in their buttonhole. Little Sue ran right up to baby May and took her by the hand and led her to the table to show her how pretty it all was. Well, after this, they came so fast it would be hard to keep track of them—little girls with pink sashes showing out from under their red Jerseys, and some with white dresses, for old king Sol up in the sky had done his best and poured down such quantities of warm golden rays that it seemed quite like summer.

The children came by twos and threes, some alone and some with their parents, and how they all laughed and exclaimed when they saw the beautiful table and learned that there was nothing on it but what was made, in part at least, of apples!

There were chairs for the grown people and long benches for the children, and after they had laughed all they wanted to, and admired everything, and chattered together, father struck with his cane on the side of the barn to attract their attention, and when they all stopped and looked, he said, "Let us sing, 'We thank Thee,'" and as that was what they sang in school they all knew it and sang with a right good will.

Everybody was then given a thin wooden plate, and the bread and butter was passed, for after all there was plain bread and butter brought by Aunt Delia at the last minute in a big basket. And then the children passed around the apple tart and the apple pie, the apple duff and the Dutch apple cake—the four kinds of apple pudding; and everybody praised the apple sauce and

said how good the apple butter was, and they all were delighted with the apple jelly that shook and sparkled and trembled exactly as if it understood all the fine things said about it, and thought that it really deserved them.

"Did you really make this delicious cider?" the visitors asked Robert.

If it is true that the proof of the pudding is in the eating, that festival was a grand success, for when everybody had gone there wasn't anything left but crumbs—excepting a great many very pleasant memories.

Before the guests went home, a number of the children spoke pieces, by request; and Bobby Snider played on his violin, which he had brought for the purpose; and Pussy Lawrence sang a pretty song, and her brother Pete sang one so funny that the children nearly fell off their seats laughing. When they went they all said what a good time they had had, and hoped they could come again. And Christobel and her cousins and brothers said yes, they hoped

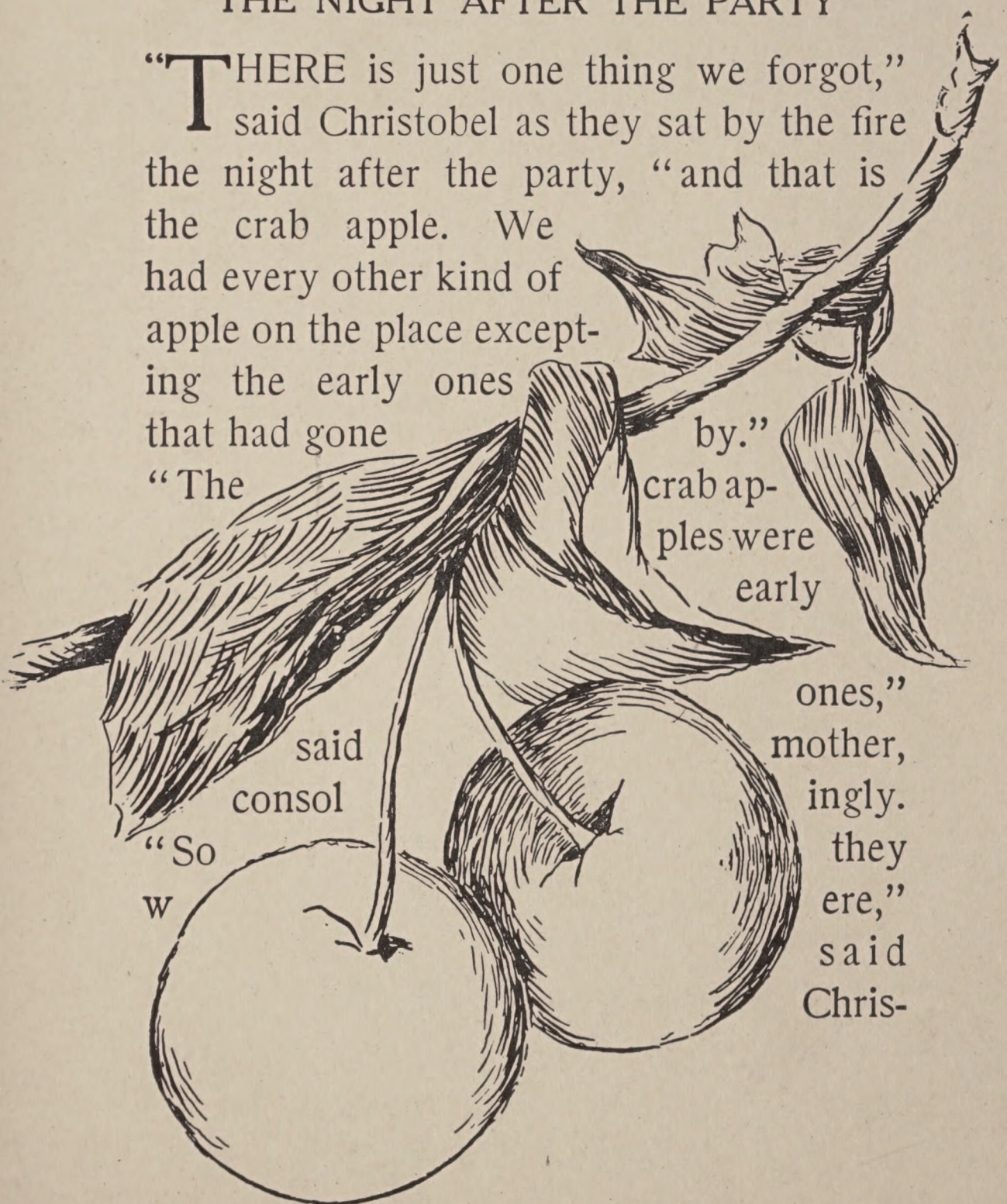
that father and mother would let them do it again next year.

Thus ended the party, excepting that there was enough of it to make talk for a long time.

XXXV

THE NIGHT AFTER THE PARTY

"THERE is just one thing we forgot," said Christobel as they sat by the fire the night after the party, "and that is the crab apple. We had every other kind of apple on the place excepting the early ones that had gone by." "The crab apples were early ones," said mother, consolingly. "So they were," said Christobel as they sat by the fire the night after the party, "and that is the crab apple. We had every other kind of apple on the place excepting the early ones that had gone by." "The crab apples were early ones," said mother, consolingly. "So they were," said Chris-



tobel, "but they are different, and next time they shall come, for I am going to make some nice crab-apple jelly on purpose."

"I wonder," went on Christobel, after a pause, "if the Apple Tree Sprite knew about our party."

"I am sure so," said Cousin Jessie. "It was probably the fairy that put it into your mind to do it."

"I didn't think of that," laughed Christobel.

"I am going to set out an orchard of my own," suddenly announced Bennie. "Father says I may."

"There is a great deal to think of," warned Robert; "just where to put it — for apple trees grow better in some places than others, you know — just what kind of soil to give them; just what varieties to choose; just how to set out the trees and prune them and graft them and keep away enemies."

"Yes, I know all that, but father says he will advise me, and there is nothing he

would like better to have me spend my time on than a young apple orchard."

"Well, I may as well have one, too," decided Robert, after a few minutes. "It will come in handy when I am grown up, and besides I mean to plant out a lot of nut trees, too. I like nuts with my apples."

"I hope," said Christobel, "that our orchard fairy will look after your trees, too; she certainly does take beautiful care of them."

"Or anyway, that just as good a one will find us," laughed Robert.

"But what can we do with so many apples?" suddenly asked Christobel.

"I know," said Bennie; "we will send them over the sea in ships. We will send them sailing away to countries where apples do not grow."

"Yes, and to the cities," added Christobel. "We will send our apples to all the cities in the world so that the little children may have all the apples they want to eat."

"I am going to send my best ones to Persia," declared Bennie, "so the people

can see how we have changed their wild apples into something beautiful."

"I thought that father said our apples came from the wild apples of Europe," said Robert. "Persia is in Asia."

"It isn't known exactly where they came from," answered father. "Some say Europe, and some believe that they came from Central Asia."



XXXVI

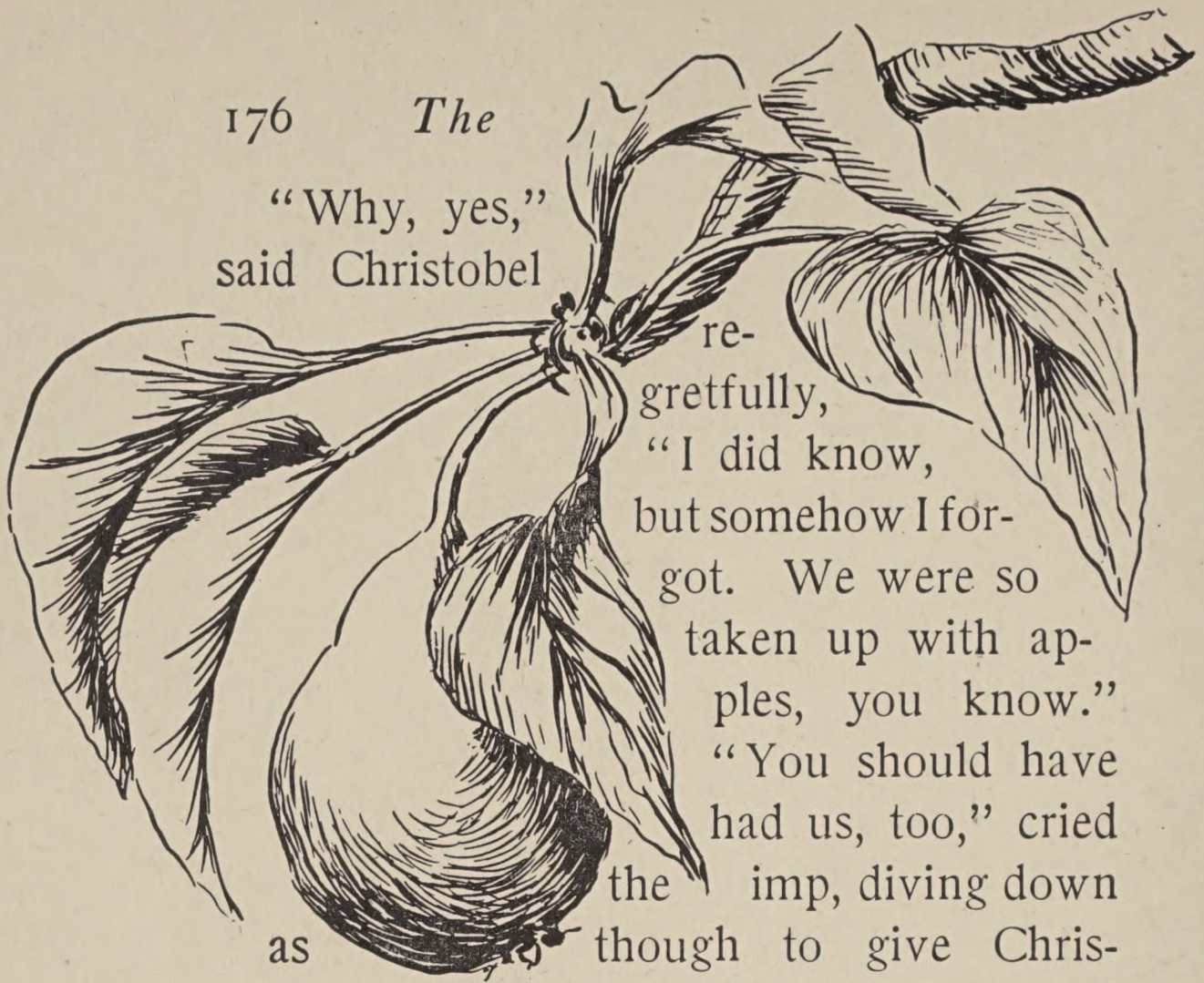
THE PEARS

THAT night Christobel waked up with a sharp pain in her toe. It did not last a minute, but it was enough to rouse her in time to see a queer little imp sitting on the bed post at the foot of the bed. It was grinning like everything and reminded Christobel of the Apple-Tree Sprite, although it did not really look like her.

"Ho! ho!" laughed the little creature; "can't I pinch when I want to?"

"Was it you pinched my toe? Why did you?"

"I wanted to talk," said the imp. "To come to the point at once, I want to scold you for leaving the pears and quinces out of your party. Don't you know they are the nearest relatives to the apples?"



"Why, yes," said Christobel regretfully, "I did know, but somehow I forgot. We were so taken up with apples, you know."

"You should have had us, too," cried the imp, diving down as though to give Christobel's toe another tweak; but she pulled it away in time and they both began to laugh.

"But," said Christobel, sobering down, "it would not be very easy, for the early pears are all gone excepting those we canned, and the late winter pears are not ripe yet."

"A poor excuse is better than none, I suppose," went on the imp, with a grimace. "Still, there are a few good, ripe pears to be had."

"Yes," admitted Christobel, "there are, and we could just as well have had some canned pears; they are very good, you know."

"Yes, I should say so," said the imp earnestly; "they are better than canned apples."

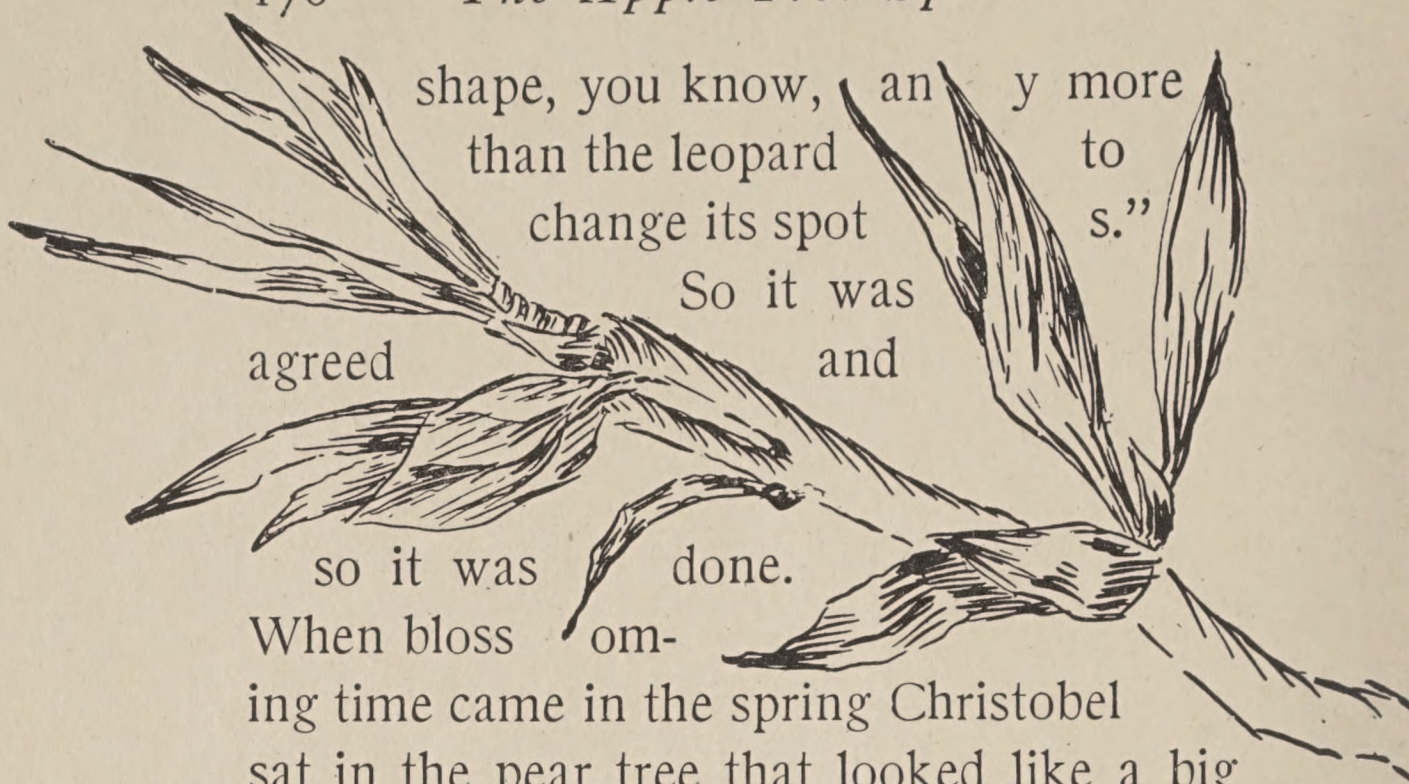
"Are you the Pear-Tree Fairy?" asked Christobel.

"Yes, I am," was the cross reply.

"Oh, may I come and visit you next spring? and will you talk to me the way the Apple-Tree Sprite talks?" asked Christobel eagerly. At which the Pear-Tree Fairy smiled like a sudden burst of sunshine and looked very sweet and pleasant.

"I will get father to fix a board in the crotch of the big old pear tree behind the house, for you know pear trees are not as good as apple trees to sit in. They grow straight up and hold their limbs up, too, instead of spreading out."

"I am aware of all that," said the fairy; "such is the habit of pear trees, and you can't expect the pear tree to change its



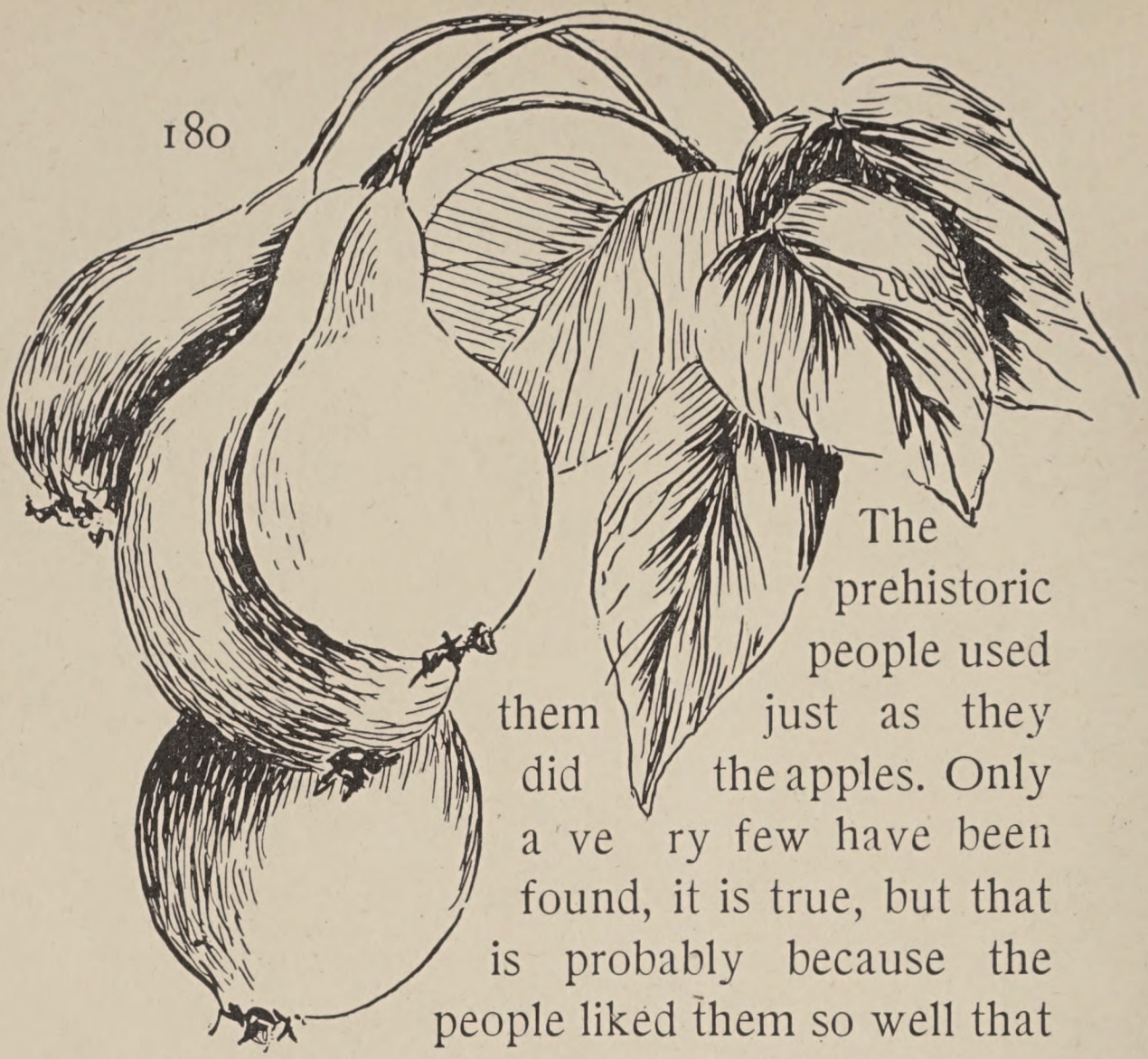
shape, you know, any more than the leopard can change its spot to us." So it was agreed and so it was done.

When blossoming time came in the spring Christobel sat in the pear tree that looked like a big white cloud, so covered was it with flowers. And to her came the Pear Tree Fairy with many a pleasant tale of the land of the pear which lay across the seas. "For you must know," said the fairy, "that pears are no more native here than are the apples. The ancestors of your pears grew wild in the northern part of Europe a long time ago, before people knew how to make use of iron or any of the metals, and had to kill and cook by the aid of bones and stones. And they also grew in Asia. We know that there were wild pear trees in Persia long, long ago."

"How do you know?" inquired Christobel.

"Oh, that is a matter of language, principally. But I can't explain it. If you grow up and study Persian and Sanskrit, and Hebrew and Aramaic, and all the rest of the languages, it will be easy enough. But I can tell you this, although the apples make so much of having been found in the Swiss and Italian lake dwellings, they are not alone in that. There were pears, too.





The prehistoric people used them just as they did the apples. Only a very few have been found, it is true, but that is probably because the people liked them so well that they ate them up instead of scattering them about for posterity to find, hundreds and thousands of years afterwards. Homer speaks of the pear, you know, and very likely Paris fed apples to Helen of Troy. And if he didn't, at least nobody can prove it.

"You know how Pompeii was buried under the ashes of Vesuvius," went on the imp after a short pause, "and how people dug the city out more than a thousand years

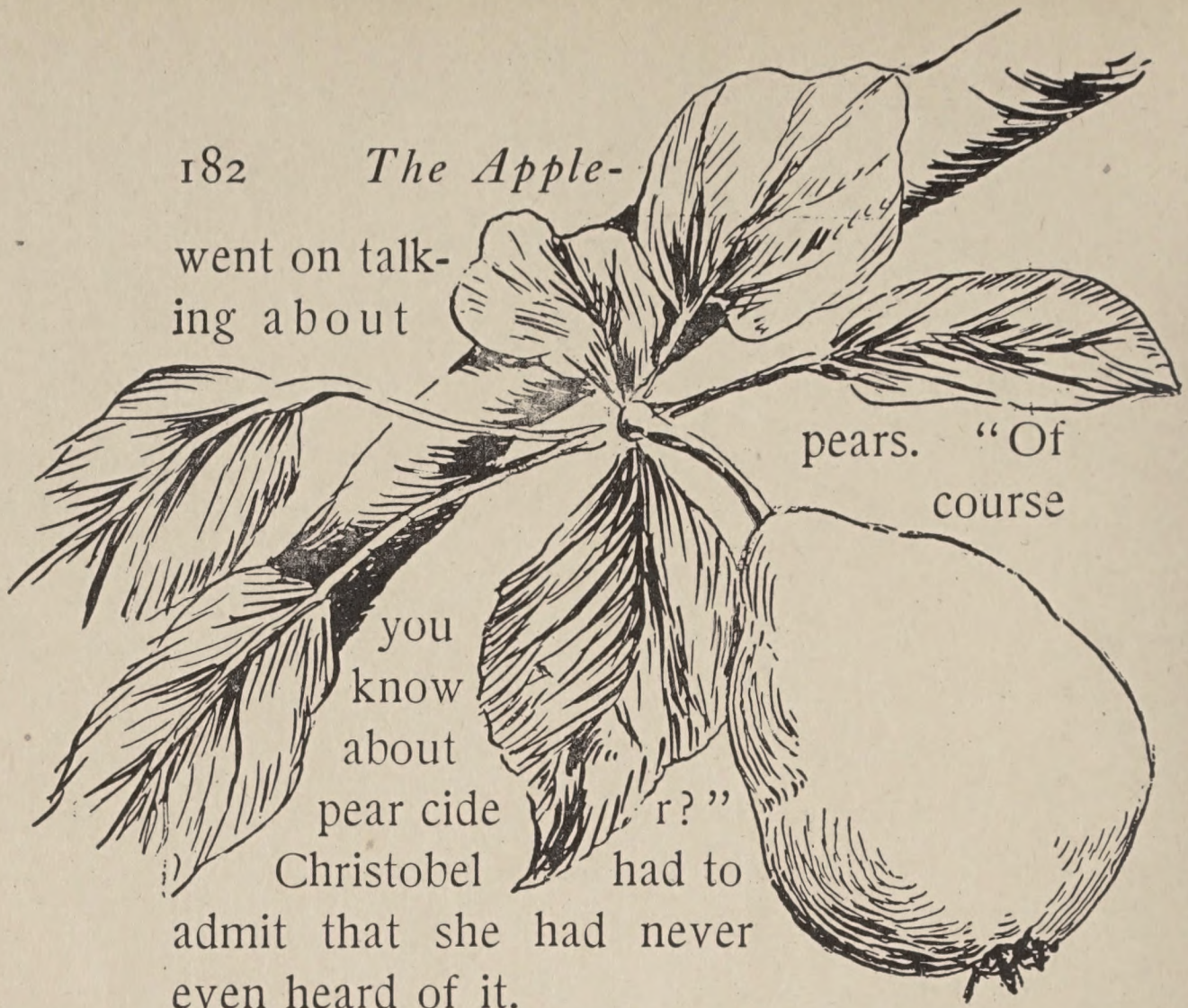
afterwards and found the walls of the houses all covered with beautiful pictures. Well, there you will see pear trees pictured on the walls, which shows how much the Romans in those days cared for pears."

"They are good," said Christobel; "a Bartlett pear is about perfect, I think, and so are the little brown Seckels; oh my, so sweet!"

"Now you are talking sense," said the fairy, who grew prettier and gayer every time Christobel had anything complimentary to say about pears. "And there are other good varieties," she went on, "some early and some late, but pear trees are rather particular, and unless they are treated properly, they do not succeed well. They are very aristocratic, you know; not able to rough it like apples, and more easily upset by neglect and poor food."

"Yes, apple trees just go right on doing their best no matter how hard their life may be," exclaimed Christobel, to which the fairy replied, "Humph!" and then

went on talking about pears. "Of course you know about pear cider?" Christobel had to admit that she had never even heard of it.



"Oh well, people do not make it much in this country. But there are places where they have nice sour cider pears, just as you have cider apples, and they make cider out of them. France is one country where they do this."

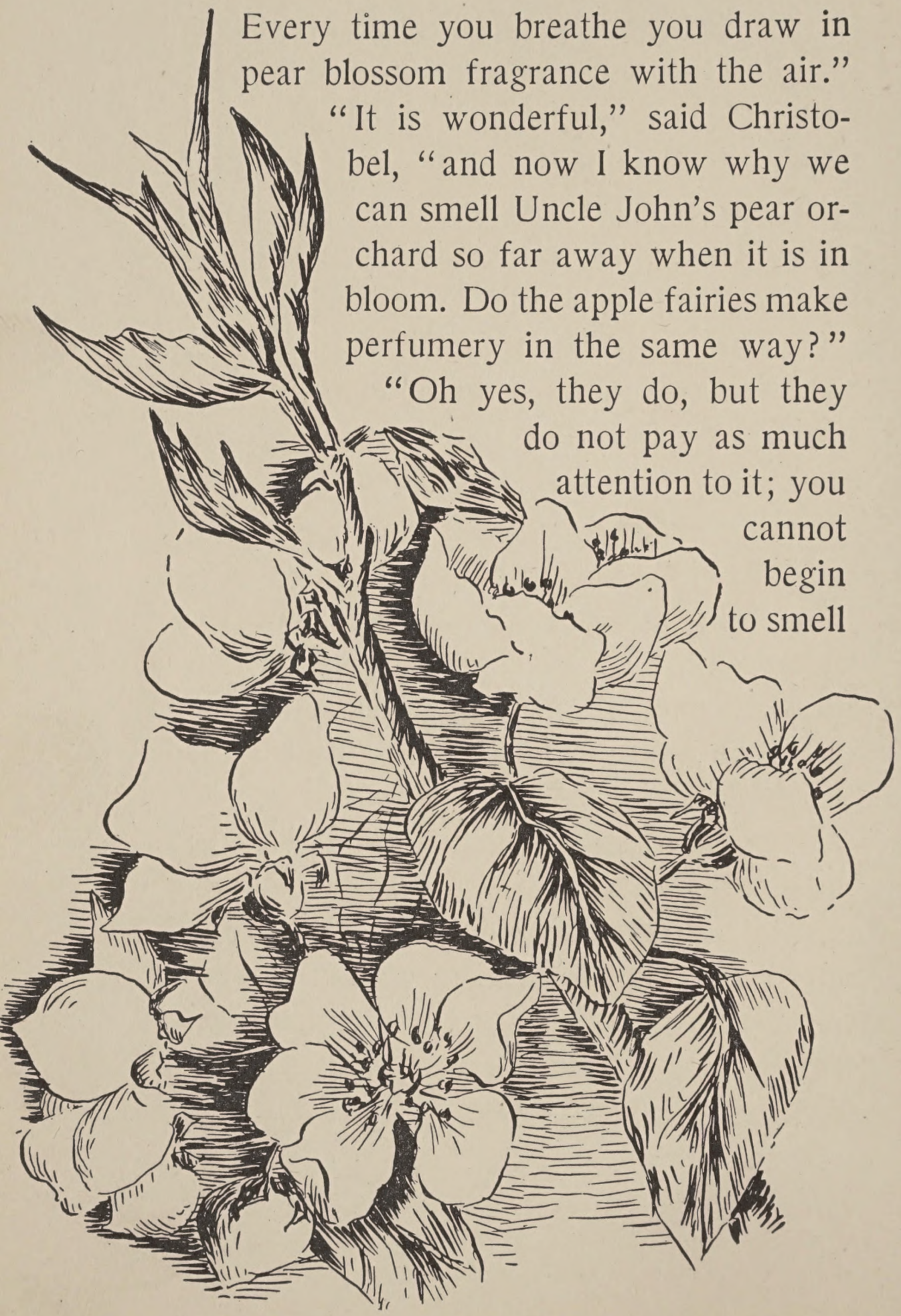
"It is wonderful how the pear tree blossoms," said Christobel; "and do you make all these great white flower-clusters?"

"I have something to do with it," chuckled the Sprite. "Would you like to see me work?" and she began to weave in

among the petals that grew as she touched them. "I take a great deal of pains with my perfumery," she went on. "See!" and she scattered something out of the flowers so small that Christobel could not see it at all until the fairy had given her a pair of her own opera glasses to look through. In order that Christobel could use them she had first to be made as small as the fairy, which of course was easy enough, as everybody knows that fairies excel in that sort of thing.

"My! how funny my eyes must look; no bigger than pin heads!" exclaimed Christobel as she took the tiny glasses and put them up to her eyes. She took one look and then fairly gasped. "What is it?" she asked excitedly, for the whole world seemed filled with little shining points floating about in the air. They made a shining mist, they were so close together, and swam out like a great soft whirling mist-cloud far away from the pear tree on all sides.

"Those," said the fairy, delighted with the effect produced, "are my scent bottles.



Every time you breathe you draw in pear blossom fragrance with the air."

"It is wonderful," said Christobel, "and now I know why we can smell Uncle John's pear orchard so far away when it is in bloom. Do the apple fairies make perfumery in the same way?"

"Oh yes, they do, but they do not pay as much attention to it; you cannot begin to smell

a blossoming apple tree as far as you can a blossoming pear tree."

"That is true," said Christobel, and changed the subject for fear she might be asked how she liked pear tree fragrance. And then she would have had to own that she very much preferred the fainter but delicate and delicious apple blossom fragrance. For the pear scent seemed to her rather overpowering and a little coarse in comparison.

"I do like to smell pear blossoms a long way off," she said to herself, remembering how delighted they all had been with the fragrance of Uncle John's pear trees that came stealing through the woods to meet them, all mixed with the fragrance of pine needles and opening willow buds.

"You see I make the little cores and the little seeds in them, all as perfect as you please," the fairy replied in answer to a question from Christobel. "You have to be extra careful about seeds, you know. Everything in the future depends on the seeds of today. And it is not always easy

to impress beautiful memories on the seeds I can tell you."

"Is that what makes beautiful pears?" asked Christobel.

"Yes, indeed," answered the fairy. "A good deal depends on my own feelings, too. When I am happy and full of sunshine myself, I somehow get it into the seeds. Even on a poor tree the way I feel makes a difference, and when in the right mood I can make the seeds remember pleasanter things than when I feel sad or mean."

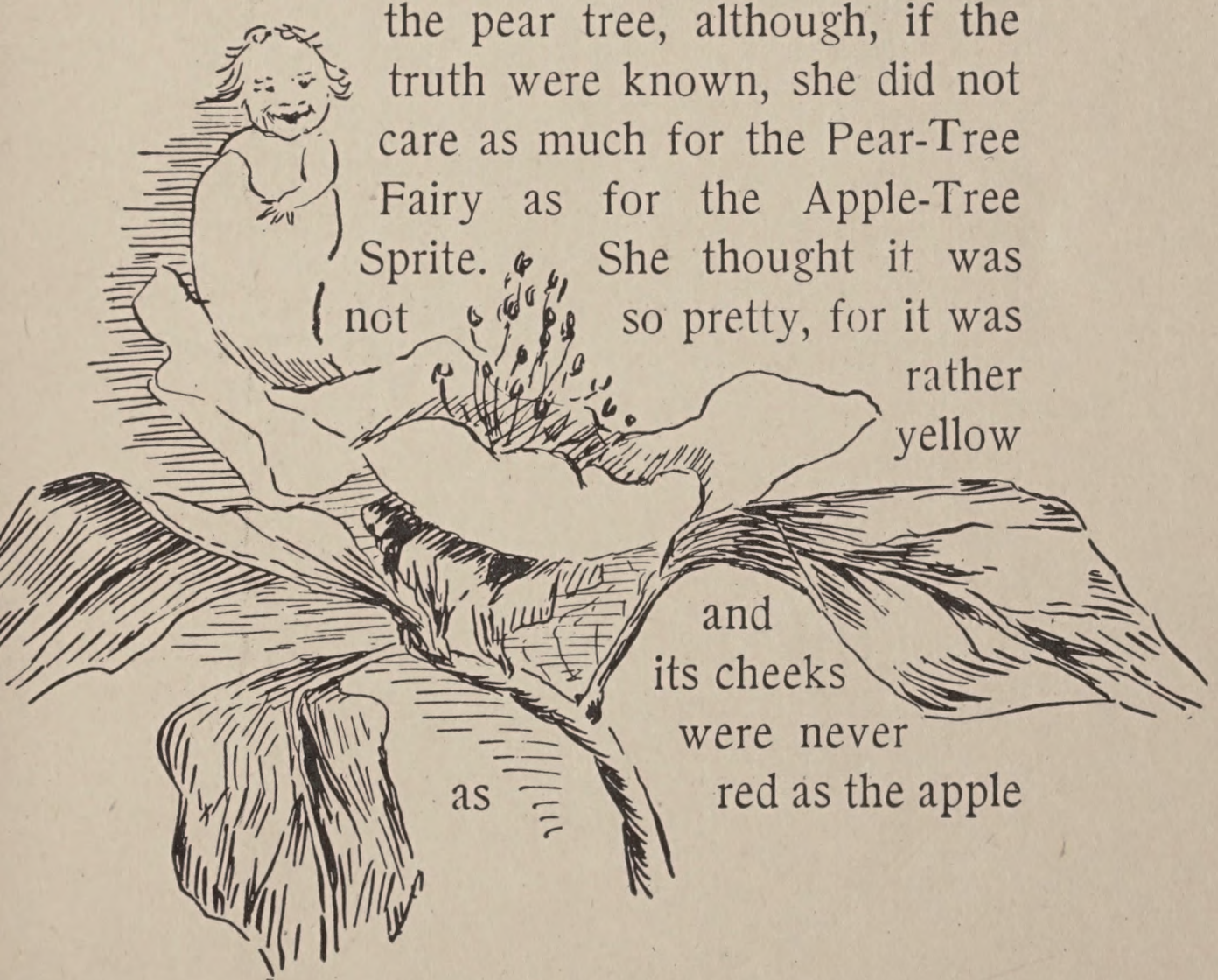
"That is why seeds differ on the same plant, I suppose," said Christobel; "some of my sweet-pea seeds were very fine and made fine strong vines that were covered with lovely flowers."

"I suppose it may be the same with the sweet peas, but I am too busy over my pears to pay much attention to such small folks — not that I am proud, but I haven't time," the fairy added quickly, fearing to be misunderstood.

XXXVII

THE QUINCE-TREE FAIRY

"WHAT was it you said about quinces last autumn when you pinched my toe?" asked Christobel one day when she saw the Pear-Tree Fairy swinging on a limb near her head. For she often went to visit the pear tree, although, if the truth were known, she did not care as much for the Pear-Tree Fairy as for the Apple-Tree Sprite. She thought it was not so pretty, for it was rather yellow and its cheeks were never as red as the apple



fairy's cheeks, and it did not smell as sweet, for you must know that each fairy smelled like the flowers it worked with, as Christobel in time discovered.

"Quinces?" repeated the Pear-Tree Fairy, "did I speak of quinces? The truth is I know very little about them. I am too busy over my own affairs, which, as you know, is working over the pear trees."

"Have our quince trees a fairy?" demanded Christobel.

"I suppose so," was the reply.

"How can I find her?" asked Christobel. "The trees are not big enough to sit in and wait quietly until something happens, as I do with you and the apple fairy."

"If you want her badly enough, I guess you won't have any trouble," said the Pear-Tree Fairy, and that was all she said.

But Christobel took the hint and went out to the quince trees that were just in bud, and looked at them very earnestly and wished in her heart of hearts that she might see the quince fairy. But no, not one appeared—at least not then. Not until she

fell asleep in her own bed thinking about how pretty and green the quince bushes looked with the white buds peeping out like so many great pearls, did the Quince-Tree Fairy appear upon the scene. Christobel woke up, or so she thought, and saw her there. My! What a funny little darling it was!

She was all dressed in light green, the color of young quince leaves, but about her shoulders was the daintiest white cape made of a quince petal, and on her dear little head was a sweet little snow white cap just edged with pink, and her face was round and as white as milk, with the pinkest cheeks, and a little pink chin, and pink ears. Her eyes were like little dancing stars, and she looked so sweet and so roguish that Christobel was inclined to think her the prettiest fairy she had ever seen.

"You see," said the fairy, as though she had read her thoughts, "I haven't been knocking about the world so much as the apple and pear fairies, and I do not have

nearly so much to do. People do not generally give us quince fairies large orchards to look after, and they are not experimenting to such an extent with the quinces, so we do not have to keep learning new ways. We spend our time thinking of the past. Now my past was spent in the land of Persia; there quinces grow wild to this very day. And the Persian princes have always loved to have us in their gardens, for the princesses love to eat the delicious preserves and candied things made from the fruit, and they always have some on their banquet tables. Ah me! how well I remember the palace of King Dushyanta—but that was after I left Persia and went down to Hindustan. It is all the same, however, for the mango tree grows there, and the young maidens hang sirisha flowers on their ears, and the nightingale sings in the sacred groves."

"That is lovely," said Christobel; "tell some more."

And the little white fairy went on and told so many wonderful things that Chris-

tobel sighed and said, "I wish I could go to Persia and have a white cat with long, soft hair and a fluffy tail sit on my shoulder, and see the blue lotus, and taste the wonderful fruits."

"Perhaps some day you can go," said the fairy, dimpling all over with pleasure that Christobel wanted to go to Persia.

"Why do you not make your quinces get all soft and sweet and ripe and juicy like peaches?" asked Christobel. "Just think how wonderful they would be."

The little white fairy shook her head. "That is not the way quinces began," she said. "They grew wild, you know, and wild fruits are generally hard and sour. Well, when man begins to select, and cross-fertilize, and develop the fruits in a thousand ways, he takes care of them. If he doesn't, they have to take care of themselves the best way they can, and they cannot possibly produce such fine fruit; well, man has never developed the quinces very much."

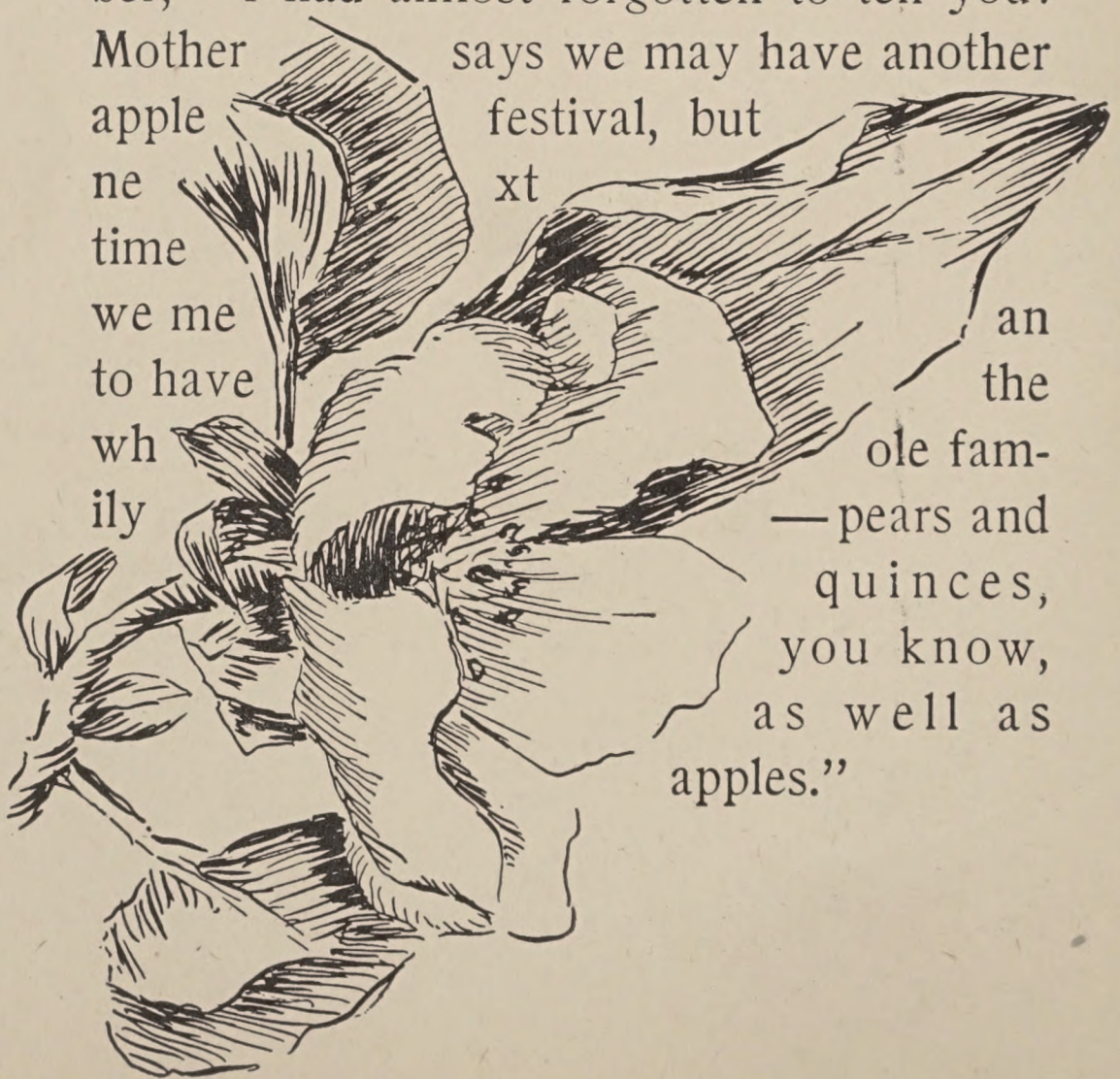
"I wonder why."

"Perhaps the day will come when he will," said the fairy; "but quinces are rather slow to yield — slower than apples, I think, though I am not quite sure. And then you have to cook quinces with fire. I haven't learned to bake them in the sun the way the apple fairies bake their apples."

"The quince has such a wonderful flavor," said Christobel.

"Yes, and it is very closely related to the apples."

"That reminds me," exclaimed Christobel; "I had almost forgotten to tell you! Mother says we may have another apple festival, but ne xt time we me an to have the wh ole family — pears and quinces, you know, as well as apples."



"I am glad of that!" and the quince fairy dimpled all over. "How are you going to have quinces prepared?"

"Oh, we shall have quince sauce, and baked quinces; they are so good, you know; and l-o-v-e-l-y quince jelly, and canned quinces, and quince preserve, and quince pudding, and quince honey! Do you know how good quince honey is? Oh no, the bees do not make it! You just grate some quinces and cook them with sugar until they are about as thick as clover honey. They look like honey, only they taste like quince."

"That must be good," said the fairy with a gleeful little laugh; "I will surely be there."

"Oh goody!" cried Christobel, clapping her hands. "I will have a little chair all ready for you."

"Never mind that," laughed the fairy; "you won't be able to see me, but I shall be there just the same; that is, if you remember to put something made of quince on the table; otherwise I cannot come, for

quince on the table is my invitation, you know."

"Oh, you shall have a whole tableful of invitations," promised Christobel, "and I will get Laura Thompson to bring her fuzzy white cat — it looks exactly like a real one, you know — to make you think of Persia."

And then morning came, and they all began to plan a new festival to which the pear and the quince fairies should be invited. And this time the crab apples were not forgotten, for Christobel remembered, and at the right time made some delicious crab apple jelly, and kept it for the occasion.



XXXVIII

COUSINS, UNCLES, AND AUNTS

"WHY don't you have all the apple cousins and uncles and aunts?" inquired Robert, teasingly, of Christobel one evening. "Do you think you ought to leave out the hawthornes, the service berries, and all the rest?"

"How do you know they belong to the apples?" asked Christobel, suspiciously.

"Oh, I know a lot," answered Robert, to which Bennie added, "He has been reading it up in the botany."

"Well," laughed mother, "that is a pretty good way to find out. But never mind, Christobel, the hawthornes and all the rest may be pretty little cousins, but they do not bear the noble fruits that the apples, pears, and quinces bear, and so there is no way to get invitations to them."

"No," cried Christobel, "you can't make hawthorne jelly!"

"No, but you can make preserves of hawthorne apples," put in Robert, looking very wise. "People used to value such preserves."

"But that was probably before there were so many good berries and other fruits to be had," added mother.

"Hawthorne apples are good to eat sometimes, the big kind, only there isn't much of anything to them," said Bennie. "Couldn't they be cultivated and in time developed into first-rate fruits, Father?"

"I think they could," answered father, "but nobody has bothered with them so far as I know. You might try, Bennie, and see if you can make a good fruit out of the hawthorne."

Bennie shook his head. "Too slow for me, Father. I would rather put my time and talent into real apples."

"That seems to be the opinion of everybody," laughed father, "so the hawthornes remain nature's fruits; good enough for the birds but not of much use to man."

"The service berries, too," went on Robert. "They are pretty good, when the birds give you a chance to taste them, but I should think they could be a great deal better."

"So they are, in Japan," answered father. "I have heard that there are fine fruits there, from trees similar to our service or shadblow trees. Very likely they will some time be introduced into this country; that would be easier than developing them from our wild fruit."

"What else did you say belongs to the apple family, Rob?" asked Bennie.

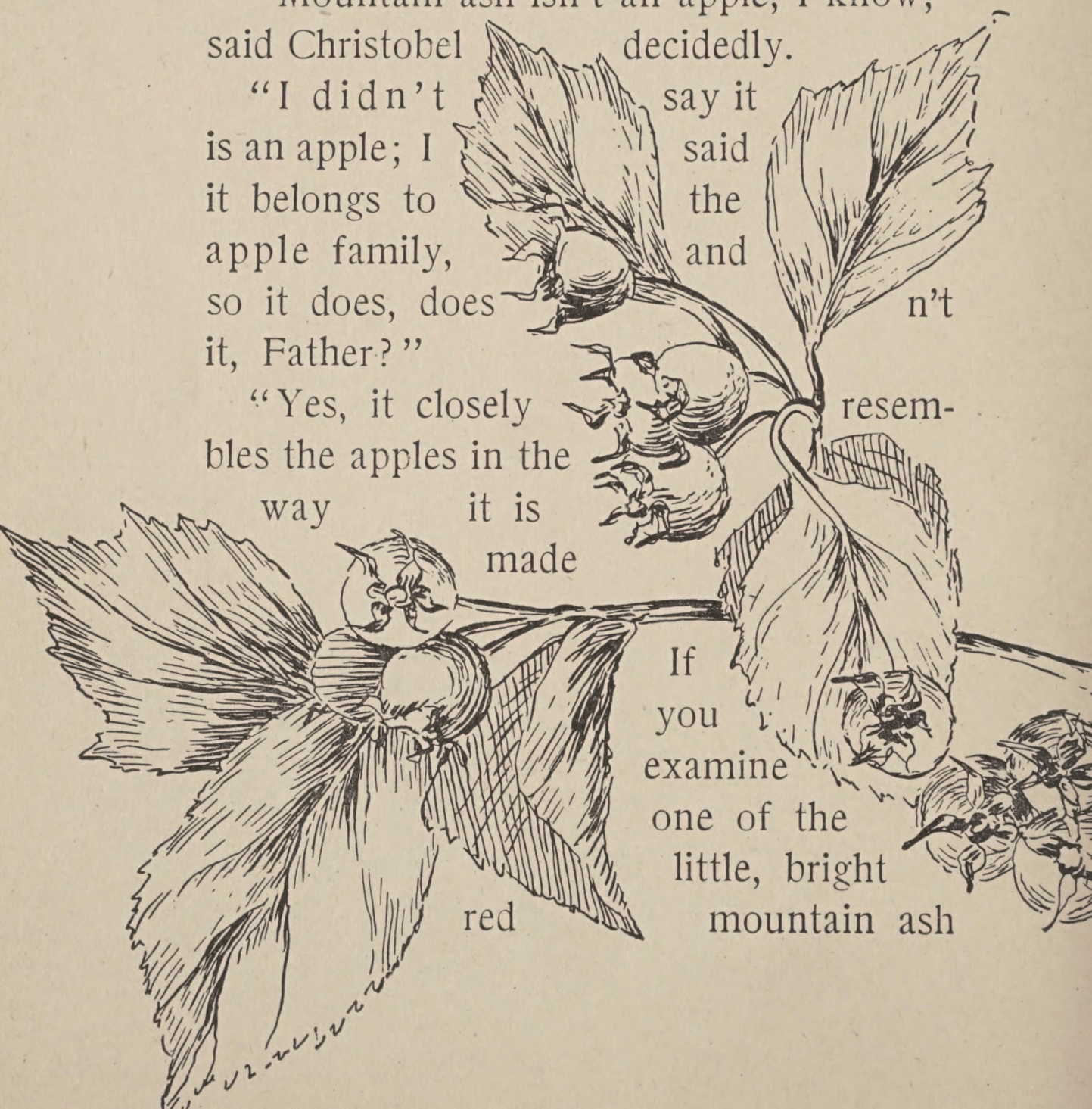
"He's forgotten," said Christobel teasingly. "Mr. Know-it-all has forgotten."

"Has he!" exclaimed Robert triumphantly; "what about mountain ash?"

"Mountain ash isn't an apple, I know," said Christobel decidedly.

"I didn't say it is an apple; I said it belongs to the apple family, and so it does, doesn't it, Father?"

"Yes, it closely resembles the apples in the way it is made. If you examine one of the little, bright red mountain ash



berries you will find it very much like a tiny apple."

"A bunch of mountain ash berries doesn't look much like apples, anyway," persisted Christobel, "but it is ever so pretty."

"You would think so if you could see it in the cold, rough mountains where it belongs," said father.

"Well, Mr. Know-everything, what else?" demanded Christobel.

"Well, Miss Saucebox, there are the chokecherries, both red and black. I know you don't know them, so I'll proceed to tell you that they are bushes. They grow in swampy places and bear bunches of small, white flowers and little, red or blackish berries. Then there are the thorn bushes, you know; a dozen or more besides the common hawthorne."

"We might use some of those to decorate with," said Bennie.

"Oh, yes!" cried Christobel. "Let us do that; that will be a good way to invite them. Will you get some for us,

you dear old good-for-nothing, know-everything Robbity Bob?"

"If you'll give me a kiss, I'll try," said Robert.

"You shall have six kisses," and little Christobel threw her arms about her brother's neck and gave him six kisses on the spot.

XXXIX

PLANTING THE APPLE TREE

YOU may be sure that when the party came off, everybody had as good a time as they had had the year before. And the table looked as pretty, or even prettier, with the quince and crab apple and pear dishes all sparkling and beautiful. And Robert had found some mountain ash berries that helped very much in the decorations.

That all the fairies of the fruit trees were there, Christobel discovered after she went to bed that night, for they all came together to visit her, and they were all dressed in their sweetest smiles and merriest sparkles. The Crab-Apple Fairy that Christobel then saw for the first time was so dainty and airy and shed such sweet fragrance in the air that Christobel thought her almost the prettiest of all, but she was such a wild and shy little thing that Christobel could get

nothing out of her but entrancing smiles. The other fairies talked fast enough, however, and said how they had enjoyed the festival, and how grateful they were to Christobel for asking them.

But, delightful as all this was, it was early next spring that perhaps the most important apple festival of all took place.

Each of the children had selected, with father's help, a good site for an orchard. Christobel had decided that she, as well as the boys, must have an orchard of her own, and even little Sue was to have one.

The planting of the first tree was made a great event. It was decided that a grand festival must be held to celebrate the occasion. Flags they would have, yes, and a procession, and speeches.

The festival was planned for Saturday. Everybody was invited, and everybody came. Even the minister came, and the principal of the school, and the teachers, besides all the neighbors, young and old—the fathers, the mothers, the babies, and everybody's uncles, aunts, and cousins.

Yes, everybody came, and all said what a great festival it was.

At the appointed hour the assembled people formed a procession, with father, mother, the boys, Christobel, and little Sue at the head. They marched with flags flying, singing as they went. They took their way to the slope where the new orchards were to lie. A hole had been dug and prepared for the first tree.

When they reached the place, the people grouped themselves about the tree planters. Then someone struck up a song of thanksgiving that everybody knew, because they often sang it in school.

All joined in, and, Oh, how they did sing! Then the minister made a short prayer, and invoked a blessing on the young orchards and young owners. Then they sang again.

Then Robert stepped forth because he was the oldest. He bore a fair young apple tree in his hands. He placed it in the ground. He straightened out its roots and then each of the four children threw in a spadeful of earth.

Then father stood up and repeated the following verse from a poem called "The Planting of the Apple Tree," by a poet who loved apple trees.

Father spoke in a clear, loud voice that everyone could hear:

Come, let us plant the apple tree.
Cleave the tough greensward with the spade;
Wide let its hollow bed be made;
There gently lay the roots, and there
Sift the dark mould with kindly care,
And press it o'er them tenderly.
As, round the sleeping infant's feet
We softly fold the cradle sheet;
So plant we the apple tree.

Then mother said the next verse in a sweet, clear voice that everyone could hear:

What plant we in this apple tree?
Buds, which the breath of summer days
Shall lengthen into leafy sprays;
Boughs where the thrush, with crimson breast,
Shall haunt and sing and hide her nest;
We plant, upon the sunny lea,
A shadow for the noontide hour,
A shelter from the summer shower,
When we plant the apple tree.

Then came Robert's turn, and he spoke up in a clear and ringing voice that everyone could hear:

What plant we in this apple tree?
Sweets for a hundred flowery springs,
To load the May-wind's restless wings,
When, from the orchard row, he pours
Its fragrance through our open doors;
A world of blossoms for the bee,
Flowers for the sick girl's silent room,
For the glad infant sprigs of bloom,
We plant with the apple tree.

Then came Bennie, and spoke his part as well as anybody:

What plant we in this apple tree?
Fruits that shall swell in sunny June,
And redden in the August noon,
And drop, when gentle airs come by,
That fan the blue September sky,
While children come, with cries of glee,
And seek them where the fragrant grass
Betrays their bed to those who pass,
At the foot of the apple tree.

Then came Christobel, who did her part so that the people all said how well she spoke:

And when, above this apple tree,
The winter stars are quivering bright,
And winds go howling through the night,
Girls, whose young eyes o'erflow with mirth,
Shall peel its fruit by cottage hearth,
And guests in prouder homes shall see,
Heaped with the grape of Cintra's vine,
And golden orange of the line,
The fruit of the apple tree.

Little Sue, who had now grown to be quite a big girl, took her place by the side of the young tree. She was a little bit frightened but she opened her mouth bravely, and in a moment forgot to be afraid. She spoke so nicely that when she was through everybody applauded. And this is what she said:

The fruitage of this apple tree
Winds, and our flag of stripe and star
Shall bear to coasts that lie afar,
Where men shall wonder at the view,
And ask in what fair groves they grew;
And sojourners beyond the sea
Shall think of childhood's careless day,
And long, long hours of summer play,
In the shade of the apple tree.

When little Sue had finished, father invited everybody to the big barn, where the children played games and the older people talked and laughed, and all had a good time, and as many fine apples as they could eat.

Next day, father and the boys and the hired men went to work to set out the rest of the trees and finish up the orchards.

And you can imagine that all of the new owners dreamed many beautiful dreams about the future of their dear trees. And let us hope that Christobel's Apple-Tree Sprite was on hand to help make it all a grand success.

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